

A Novel of Anne Boleyn

*Le Temps
Viendra*

S A R A H M O R R I S



Le Temps Viendra:
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This book is dedicated to two outstanding women: Natalie Dormer whose definitive portrayal of Anne Boleyn in the Showtime Series, 'The Tudors' was as complex, compelling and beguiling as the lady herself. In so many ways, this stirred my creative spirit and set the fertile ground for bringing forth this novel. Also, of course, to the woman who was, and will ever be, an irrepressible force of nature. She captured the heart of a King and changed a nation's history. In honour of your courage, strength and your eternal innocence, I dedicate this book to you; Anne Boleyn, Queen of England.

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*"If any person will meddle of my cause, I require them
to judge the best."*

Queen Anne Boleyn

1501-1526 “Innocent”

Prologue

The Tower of London

8.30am, May 19, 1536

Today I die. Do not grieve for me for I no longer fear death; he who hath stalked me for so long now. It is not, as I said to Master Kingston, that I desire death, but the grim inevitability of my fate has caused me to become reconciled with it. I have made my peace with God and my spirit yearns to be free of this body and of this cruel and unjust world. Within the hour, I will gladly walk to the scaffold and if I am lucky, I will not feel the cold steel of the Sword of Calais cleave my head from this sinful body. Yet I have not sinned as they say I have - at least not in this lifetime. I have been convicted of treason, adultery and incest. This suits their purpose. Cromwell to save his own skin by annihilating not only me, but my brother, and those who lived and loved for the name and honour of Anne Boleyn; the King so that he may indulge his

changing passions and take Mistress Seymour for his new wife. Yet to my God, I confess different sins.

In this lifetime I have been cruel and spiteful to the previous queen, Katherine, and the Lady Mary, the King's eldest daughter. In my wild and unbridled jealousy, I lashed out making their life a misery, encouraging Lady Shelton to degrade and humiliate Mary for her defiance of me and my marriage to Henry. I did not honour her high birth or her loyalty to her mother. How could I have blamed her, when I could no more dishonour my own mother if our situations had been reversed? They deserved my compassion and for this cruelty, I truly repent. Yet there is more than even they know.

As one of my ladies, pale from the stress of preparing her mistress to die, holds up a mirror for me to see my reflection, I adjust the necklace that was once a gift from the King; a cipher with my initial, 'A' set with diamonds that adorns my slender neck. I pause for a brief moment and catch my eye and know that I carry a secret that no one in this world

knows. This is indeed a strange story beyond all imagining. You see I no longer truly know who I am. Time, and my true identity, have become distorted. I have been caught up in living a dual reality that has spanned time and lifetimes. In the mirror, a convicted traitor, I see myself as Anne Boleyn, Queen of England. Yet in consciousness, I know that I have also been living another life, in another time. I do not know how this has been happening or why me. Is it possible that souls in their immortality can exist in multiple realities at once? I do know this though - that I have also been living a modern life, a 21st century life and in that life I am just plain Anne.

Yet even this modern Anne has sinned wretchedly. I have watched both lives become inextricably entwined, each reality reflecting and shaping the other. I have tried, oh dear Lord. I have tried to stop it all, to change the outcome; but it has been a fruitless quarry as I have witnessed both my lives hurtle head long toward disaster. I have tasted the cup of poison that

is fate and now I surrender to her will. Surely now with my death I will atone for my sins. God forgive me; Jesus Christ have mercy upon my soul. Take me now; I am ready to be free.

Part One

Chapter One

Heber Castle

June 26, 2007

Looking back, I can remember as plain as if it were yesterday how it all began. It was an unpretentious summer that showed no sign of being remarkable in any way. The only thing that I had marked on my calendar was a weekend away, indulging in my lifelong passion for Tudor history and Anne Boleyn. If truth be known, I felt a little embarrassed. Few people knew of my long standing love affair with Anne Boleyn, which had begun as a child of eight or nine years of age. Fascinated with the world of the Tudor court, Anne quickly emerged from the pages of history books as an alluring, captivating, intelligent and courageous young woman and right there and then I had fallen for her. Much like Henry I imagine, I could not take my eyes from her; she was utterly compelling to me. Anne was a force of nature; a force that

had not diminished over the centuries. As the years had passed, I read and reread her story and as I did so, I grew more deeply involved in her character, in her passion, her wit, her fierce determination, and ultimately her betrayal. I visited the places associated with her life as I grew into adulthood. Sometimes, it almost felt as if I could reach out and touch her; as if she were trying to speak to me – to show me her life – the exhilaration and the suffering. By the time I was a young woman, she was my secret indulgence; my love affair with Anne outlasted anything that Henry had experienced and unlike Henry, I was still utterly enthralled. By my mid thirties, I was lucky to live in Greenwich, England, not a stone's throw away from the 18th century Royal Naval College which was built on the site of Henry's original Tudor palace, the most favoured of all his 'Great Houses'. I passed it daily on my way into the City to work; I would often find myself daydreaming longingly, trying to imagine the magnificence of the original building, soaring up majestically from the banks of the Thames; little did I know then that there would come a day when, beyond all reason and

comprehension, I would see the palace with my own eyes and even come to think of it as home.

Yet all this was to come. At the beginning of that fateful summer, I still felt very much like any ordinary girl, with no more or less of a mix of life's joys, trials and tribulations than the next person. I thanked God that I was strong and resilient though; for the past few years had been difficult ones. I married in my early twenties, rushing headlong into a commitment that in retrospect I had given little serious thought to. Over the years, I forgave myself for my youthful exuberance and I understand now that I had probably been trying to escape a persistent sense of a lack of belonging that had stalked me since my childhood.

Although my relationship started with such promise, it disintegrated after only eight short years. I discovered that I had married a man who was an alcoholic. I tried to rescue him - and us - countless times. However, the pernicious, destructive force of the drink resulted in a seductive potency that was

way beyond my capacity to help him. It took an inordinate amount of broken promises and eroded trust before I finally realised I could not save my husband from his own demons; he had to want salvation for himself. After hiding from the truth for several years, it eventually became all too clear that he did not want it badly enough; oh yes, it had been a humbling experience to realise that a bottle of alcohol seemed to be a more appealing companion than I could ever be. So, after eight years of trying to make everything right, I accepted that I would never win that war and I left; I walked out of the marriage, ultimately taking very little with me only to start again from scratch.

Even though it was I who finally ended the relationship, in the months that followed, the suffering I experienced was acute; my life seemed to be disintegrating around me. All the security and familiarity that I imagined I had built up to keep me safe, seemed to be melting away. My then husband cast himself all too readily in the role of one of life's victims; it was a role he had perfected over the years and through our subsequent divorce he played it out to Oscar-worthy acclaim.

The whole tempestuous process dragged on for over two years. I was determined to hold onto my integrity and compassion for a man that in my heart I still loved, but accepted that I could not be with. Yet he hated me for what I had done to him; sometimes a degree of black humour unveiled the irony that it never occurred to him that much of what now transpired, he had brought solely upon himself.

So, for the longest twenty-four months of my life, we lurched from one divorce crisis to another. Finally, when there were no more diversions or obstacles that he could dream up to keep me locked in an endless cycle of attention seeking, we signed our divorce papers. It was perhaps one of the most liberating moments of my life. How strange, I often mused that in order to feel so free, one had to know such bondage first. It took me another year to fully find my feet again and work through the guilt which I still felt in 'abandoning' him and the so many 'what ifs' that haunted my waking hours. Finally, I accepted where my responsibility lay and saw the wisdom in letting go of what was not my baggage to carry. I sent him many

blessings in my heart and began to rebuild my life.

Over the years, I often wondered why I found Anne so compelling. I suspected that I related to many of the complex aspects of her character. I was well aware, for example, that from the tender age of seventeen – when I started flirting with boys – I was always described by my paramours as 'not stunningly beautiful but wildly sexy'. I was never short of male attention and adoration, and cared little for not being seen as classically beautiful. I preferred sexy – it reminded me of Anne and how her contemporaries had struggled to fathom just how she had managed to capture the attention of the King of England. Physically, however, I was entirely dissimilar to my heroine as I had blond hair and blue eyes; although like her, I was slim and probably of similar height, given the descriptions that I have read of Anne. In short, I suppose I had always 'got her' and her approach to life. We had a lot in common.

So, there I was, indulging in the most geekyish thing yet. Six

months earlier, I came across a web site dedicated to all things 'Anne Boleyn' and there in front of me was an offer I could not refuse. It was an 'Anne Boleyn Connoisseur's Weekend'; a chance to follow in the footsteps of Anne from her childhood home of Hever Castle to Hampton Court and ultimately a visit to the Tower of London for the anniversary of her death. Even more enticing was the closure of Hever Castle for one morning, just for our party, so that we could explore it at our leisure. A famous author who had written much on the subject was due to give a talk about the life of Anne Boleyn, and to complete this perfect day, there was to be an actress who played Anne in film, who would be there wearing her costume to further indulge us. I booked it straight away, whilst keeping my intended trip particularly vague with friends and family.

The weeks quickly flew by and during one of the hottest weeks of the year, I found myself pulling up to Hever Castle. I had planned a thoroughly enjoyable weekend, immersing myself entirely in my passion. Not unreasonably, I imagined

that after the vacation was over, I would simply return to my life and take up its many familiar threads.

How could I ever have known then that nothing was further from the truth; that I was about to be catapulted head first into an adventure that was far beyond my wildest imagining.

It was a beautiful, and unusually hot, June day as our select and eager group made its way across the wooden drawbridge of Hever Castle and into the welcome shade of the small inner courtyard that lay beyond. Emerging from beneath the castle's gatehouse onto the uneven cobblestones underfoot, my gaze was drawn skyward to a perfect blue sky. Swifts circled round above our heads, swooping and diving; endlessly singing their songs in a joyful celebration of life. I had been in this place several times before; twice as a child on happy family outings with my grandparents, who had raised me since I was five years old, and again as an adult, visiting a couple of times under my own steam. It was hard to keep away and I found myself drawn back, time and time again, by this lovely little

house buried deep in the idyllic Kent countryside, with all its ghostly voices and hidden secrets.

The 12th century castle had been renovated by Thomas Boleyn shortly after inheriting it following the death of his father, William in 1505; he was both an accomplished linguist and valued diplomat who served at the court of King Henry VIII. I often imagined that he must have found the new family home at Hever a rather more convenient residence lying, as it did, between London and the Port of Dover, rather than the more remote Blickling Hall in Norfolk, which had previously served as the family home.

Hever is a fairy-tale castle, a miniature and far more homely version of the rather imposing, defensive castles of the earlier Norman era. Turreted and adorned with many beautiful red brick Tudor chimneys, it is surrounded by a double moat; sculpted rose gardens and a wooded parkland, which lies beyond. The castle's partially ivy covered walls embrace the life story of a time which changed England's history, and I

have never failed to swell with pride, thinking about the English woman who had grown up here as a child before making her momentous debut onto the dangerous and glittering stage that was the Tudor court.

As I made my way into the centre of the courtyard, I looked up at the many small and delicate windows that made up the inner façade; the three sides of the building which faced inwards onto the inner sanctum at the heart of the castle. Glancing up and to my right, I also noticed that one of the windows on the first floor had been propped open, no doubt to keep the rooms within aired in the growing heat of the late morning. I couldn't help but imagine Anne looking excitedly down into the courtyard, at the King sweeping across the drawbridge in a flurry of colour and pageantry on one of his impromptu and passionate visits.

“Now, listen everybody.” My attention snapped back from my reverie. I strained my neck from the back of the crowd to see our group leader, a blond haired woman called Miranda,

gesturing for everyone to gather round. I held back. I never did like crowds; they made me feel trapped.

“We have the privilege today of having our own private tour of the castle by the Head Steward of Hever. He will be showing us some really special items associated with Anne Boleyn; rest assured there will be plenty of time to see everything and ask lots of questions. If you would follow me, we will start our tour in the Entrance Hall.” With that, Miranda swept out of the afternoon sunlight and into the darkness of the entrance to the castle, leaving us all to file in dutifully behind her. I stepped back, allowing all but a shy and petite blond, about my age, to go through before me. Finally, I too stepped inside and out of the burgeoning heat.

The Inner Hall – which by the standards of most castles was in fact rather delicately proportioned - was one of my favourite parts of the castle. Despite its 20th century renovations by the extraordinarily wealthy Astor family, the intricately carved, wooden panelled hallway, lying just to the

right of the main entrance, was always warm and welcoming. What I most loved about this room were the portraits of some of the most notable figures in Tudor history; Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI and, of course, the two sisters, Mary and Anne Boleyn. I gradually eased my way around the outside of the group which, being almost twenty-five strong, filled this modest sized room. Anne's portrait was the one painting above all that I wanted to reacquaint myself with.

Like a mother hen, Miranda continued her clucking, ushering us all inside and ensuring everyone was within earshot before she started speaking again. "I'd like to introduce you all to Tom Fletcher, Head Steward here at Hever and..." perhaps rather rudely, I tuned out Miranda's introduction to our rather portly guide, as I found myself at last standing in front of the portrait of Anne herself.

'So I'm here again', I said silently in my head. 'I haven't told anyone this time. Let this be our guilty secret!' Anne looked back out at me, enigmatic and enthralling as ever. She

seemed amused that she could hold me in her sphere of influence for so long – and so effortlessly. I smiled back. I could not help myself; so few pictures of Anne survived the culling of the Boleyn faction in 1536 that I always felt privileged to see her face, even if it was a later copy of a lost original. 'So let us go on another journey together, Anne. Do with me as you will.'

I was about to turn my attention back to the group when suddenly, pain exploded in my head; it felt like nothing short of being hit on the back of a head by a hammer. It was incredibly intense and I swear to God that I have never experienced such blinding agony before in my life. I found myself swaying forward, stopping myself from falling only by gripping onto the arm of a nearby antique chair, which was positioned against the wall and just to the side of the portrait. Nausea surged its way up from the pit of my stomach. I gripped on to the chair as the room began to move under my feet and heat ripped through my body. It was all I could do to remain upright and fight the growing tightness in my throat.

“Now, if you look over here, you will see a painting of...” the sound of Tom's voice droned in and out of my consciousness, as I focused on not throwing up over the castle's valuable antique furniture and making a complete spectacle of myself within the first ten minutes of our tour.

“Excuse me...” I whispered urgently to young man standing next to me, as I started to weave my way back round the edge of the group, toward the door where I noticed a second guide standing alone by the main entrance. Reaching the guide, I made myself breathe deeply as thankfully, the pain in my head began to subside just a little. I finally found my voice, “Excuse me, I am feeling a little unwell. It must be the heat. I’m wondering if there are any toilets nearby...if I could just splash some cool water over my face...”

“Oh dear, you do look a little peaky!” The guide, whose name badge gave her away to be

‘Helen’ gently took hold of my elbow and kindly allowed me the opportunity of leaning against her to steady myself. At

least the room had stopped swimming, but I was still unsure as to whether I could hold the contents of my stomach. “There’s a bathroom on the next floor. Why don’t you let me show you the way? It’s just along here.”

Walking by Helen’s side, we made our way as quickly as I was able along the corridor leading away from the Inner Hall, through the ornately decorated Library and Morning Room, before finally stopping at a narrow spiral stone staircase. “If you go up here and straight through the next room, you will find Mick, who is another one of our guides, in the Long Gallery. He will be able to direct you from there. Sorry it’s such a long way, my dear.” Helen lightly touched my shoulder and cocked her head to one side as she enquired, “Will you be alright on your own? I shouldn’t really leave these downstairs rooms unattended.” I smiled at the warmth of her concern but I realised that I really was feeling just a little better. The pain had eased off a shade and at least the room was now still.

“I’ll be fine. I am feeling much better.” I laughed dismissively, if not a little unconvincingly, as I gestured with a flourish. “It is nothing really, I just get a bit funny in crowds. I am sure I’ll be fine.” With that, I smiled reassuringly; this seemed to do the trick, and I watched Helen turn and scuttle back toward the Entrance Hall. Turning to face the staircase, I then gingerly made my way upwards, occasionally stopping to take a breath and steady my still queasy stomach. I knew where I was heading. I had been this way before. The small room, reputedly Anne Boleyn’s bedroom, lay just a few turns of the staircase above me.

Perhaps it was the exertion of climbing, but I must have been only about half way up the narrow stairs when my head had started to throb again. I paused, leaning against the cool stone, feeling its rough surface against my cheek, which felt ablaze with heat. What on earth was the matter with me? Suddenly, I heard the sound of laughter from the room above me. I craned my neck in an attempt to see round the next turn, rubbing the sides of my temple in the hope of easing the

pain. 'Who on earth could that be? I thought the castle was closed,' I mused to myself. I was sure that I had left all our party well behind me, engrossed in every word of our new guide. 'Oh well,' I thought dismissively, 'perhaps it is just a couple of the castle's staff messing around on a day when they know there are few visitors.' The laughter faded and I continued to feel my way upwards, slowly, one step at a time.

“Anne, Anne, come quickly....” I stopped abruptly, leaning my head to the side, straining against the pounding in my head in order to hear the muffled voice more clearly. 'Was someone calling me?' The voice of a woman was definitely up ahead. How strange? Another Anne? It couldn't be me they were calling, nobody knew me there; I had made it my business to keep a pretty low profile since arriving. Despite my queasiness, I pressed forward, my curiosity definitely piqued. I finally reached the top of the staircase and stepped into the small, rather odd shaped room at the top, recognising it immediately as Anne Boleyn's bedroom. Much to my surprise there was no-one there. I rubbed my face with

my hand in an effort to think more clearly, as if I could erase the increasing heaviness in my head by doing so. I thought that I must have got it wrong, or perhaps whoever it was had moved on from the room toward the Long Gallery, which I knew from my previous visits lay ahead of me.

I stopped for a moment in the doorway and looked about the tiny, yet cosy room. Light shone in through the mullioned window, which ran along one short wall. I could see the Astor Wing – a complex of mock Tudor houses built to accommodate Lord Astor's guests in the 20th century - stretching out below, beyond the moat. As enchanting as this room was, I had to confess, I was always a little dismissive of the myth that this tiny room could ever belong to Anne Boleyn. I couldn't even imagine getting a reasonable sized bed in here, let alone the belongings of a queen-in-waiting! Perhaps it had been her nursery, or her bedroom as a small child. I shrugged. No matter. Now was not the time for philosophical and historical debate. I realised that I began to feel hot again and more than a little nauseous. Anne would

have to wait; I needed the powder room quickly!

Wincing at the pain now throbbing again in my skull, I made a move to walk forward from the doorway. Again, I found myself halting; a sweet and fragrant perfume filled the air; it smelt of roses and seemed to surround me from nowhere. I looked around; there were no flowers in the room and the windows were all shut; so it couldn't possibly be fragrance coming up from the rose gardens below. I shook my head as if to clear it, and then rather rapidly wished I hadn't, as pain shot through my temples once more. My mind turned back to finding Mick which was, by then, becoming a matter of priority. I needed somewhere to throw up – or faint. I was not quite sure which, but I didn't want to be this ill in public. I was mortified enough already and with determination, I moved forward through the room and into the Long Gallery.

To my dismay, it was empty with no sign of my promised guide. “Damn it!” I muttered to myself under my breath. A treasure hunt for the ladies in a castle with God knows how many rooms - and with no idea which way I was going. With

as much haste as I could muster, I made my way along the one hundred foot long gallery. Ordinarily, I should have been enthralled by its moulded plaster ceiling, oak panelling; enchanted by the shafts of afternoon sunlight coming through the many recessed windows and falling as dappled light on the well worn oak floor. On that day, however, I was feeling far too ill to fully appreciate its charms. As I walked its length, I noticed the room was currently home to a number of exhibits and waxwork figures of Henry and his six wives. I found it weird. I had only ever been here in the tourist season and usually had to weave my way through the crowds of visitors, but that day it was very different. Rather disconcertingly, I found myself alone with only ghosts for company. Mick was still nowhere in sight; nor was the person whose voice I could hear laughing and calling my name.

As I reached the end of the gallery, the room began to move again, as another wave of nausea swept its way up to grip my throat. I was in imminent danger of passing out, I felt sure of it. Without giving it a second thought, I staggered over to

the raised recess on my right and slumped unceremoniously onto the window seat which looked out across the moat below. I could no longer open my eyes, as when I did, the room spun so much that it added almost unbearably to my desire to throw up. I was suddenly incredibly hot and tore at the jacket I was wearing in order to free myself of it. Sweat rolled down my forehead. Thankfully, one of the windows next to where I seated myself was open, allowing a gentle breeze to caress my fevered brow. I felt alone and scared. What was the matter with me? “Oh Lord!” I muttered, agitated and restless. The room began to move in and out of focus, as I fought to remain conscious and then blackness came - and my life changed forever.

Part Two

Chapter One

Hever Castle,

May 31, 1527

“Anne, Anne, come, come quickly, he's nearly here!” I heard the woman's excited voice at a distance at first, vague and unclear. But it sounded familiar. I toyed distractedly with the words but seemed unable or disinclined to respond.

“Anne, wake up! Wake up!” Suddenly the voice came into clear focus, almost upon me; I was startled awake, brought to consciousness as someone grabbed, and then shook, my arm. “Anne, what is the matter with you? Do you hear me? He is nearly here!”

Fighting the grogginess in my head, I realised that the voice

that I was hearing was the same one that I had heard on the staircase shortly before I passed out. It took me some time to focus. At first, all I knew was that the searing pain, the nausea, and the heat in my body had disappeared. 'Thank God for that,' I thought to myself. I must have passed out, but clearly I was OK. I was still in one piece; someone had even come to find me. My party must have missed me after all. Perhaps Helen had been worried when I did not return. Yet, when I finally managed to open my eyes, I could not quite believe what I was seeing.

I was still in the Long Gallery, although I couldn't see along its full length as I was hidden away in the same recess that I had taken refuge in at the far end of the room. However, I was increasingly aware that what I could see in front of me looked somehow, strangely different. The ceiling was heavily stuccoed with foliage whilst the plain walls were decorated with various gilt framed oil paintings, all painted on board; I shook my head slightly in disbelief; I was sure that before I passed out, the walls had been clad in fine oak

panelling. Each painting was a portrait of either a dignified looking man or woman, dressed in ornate medieval or Tudor dress; none of them was familiar to me. The light still fell in pools across the floor, and I could feel the warm and fragrant breeze gently touch my face and neck. However, in my still semi-aware state, I was terribly confused. I would swear on my life that these paintings had not been there before I passed out. Yet, I mused that surely I could not have been out cold long enough for someone to change these things around.

It was only then that I became aware of the young woman kneeling at my feet; the person whose voice I had heard emerging from the blackness, and who had brought me back to consciousness with her forceful shaking of my arm. I looked at her, shifting my gaze downward to meet her soft hazel-brown eyes. I was transfixed by the light that played in those eyes and the look of affection which she clearly bore me. I stared at her, not quite believing what

I saw for, before me, was a woman dressed in the most elegant Tudor gown I had ever seen. With a tight fitting bodice and voluptuous skirts, the gown was made of the deepest russet red velvet, the embroidered edge of the linen smock beneath, clearly visible above the low-cut, square neckline, whilst satin finished the full sleeves that were turned back, and which tumbled to the ground around where she knelt. Her skin was radiant and glowed in the warmth of the day. I noticed a long and straight nose and cupid-like, rosy red lips. About her neck were strung two strands of gold chain from which hung a delicate gold cross. In turn, a single pearl drop hung down from the cross to just above a brooch of ornate gold; it had been worked into the shape of a rose and attached to the front of her bodice. I could not help but notice how that bodice gripped her curves, forcing her breasts to rise and fall visibly above the neck-line. She certainly seemed to be out of breath from the exertion of running to find me. I could not see this lady's hair; for this picture of an English rose was framed with what I

recognised to be an English hood, clearly tailored to match her gown and which covered her hair completely, so that I could not see its colouring. I nearly laughed aloud. I could not believe that my party were dressing up already and in my own drama, I was missing all the fun!

Suddenly, the young woman, whose expectant face was fixed on my own, squeezed my hand. For a moment, I fixed my gaze upon those delicate hands, admiring her long elegant fingers, which were bejewelled with several glittering rings.

“Anne, are you well? You must have dozed off up here.”

I did not speak – for I couldn't speak; my mind was still racing, unable to make any sense of what I was seeing – she pressed on. “But listen, the King is coming. His messenger came ahead to warn our father. He must be nearly here by now. Are you coming? You know he has come for you, my beautiful, intelligent sister. You must make ready.” Mary shook my hand in some exasperation, before she added with great urgency, “If you make haste, there will still be time to

change into your new French gown; the King will not be able to take his eyes off you!”

My ‘new French gown’... ‘The King’, coming here, to see me? What on earth was she talking about? I did not recognise this woman from our party, but I assumed the organisers must have gone to some serious trouble to set this one up. I was impressed and about to say so, but something in the woman's earnest gaze held me back. I felt something stir inside of me – a knowing, an understanding of something far beyond my conscious awareness. I felt inexplicably drawn to this woman, who now held my hand so tightly. I must have smiled, for she impulsively leaned forward and kissed me gently on the cheek, wide-eyed excitement radiating from her face. Suddenly, she rose to her feet and turned to look toward the door. As she did so, I too heard what had caught her attention. Shouts echoed from within the castle; they seemed to be coming from the direction of the inner courtyard. Then, growing louder and

more thunderous with every second, there came the sound of horses' hooves clattering over the drawbridge and onto the cobbled stones.

“He's here! Anne, we don't have much time. We must go!” With that, the young woman grabbed my hand once more and pulled me to my feet. To my relief, my legs, which I recalled had felt so unsteady before I had collapsed, were now strong again and bearing me forward effortlessly, hurried along by my unknown companion. In my confusion, I was hardly able to say a word, let alone resist the insistent tugs which kept up our momentum. Before I knew it, we had left the Long Gallery, gone down a short flight of stairs and through two further rooms; each one as beautifully adorned as the Gallery itself; portraits, heavy oak furniture - all elaborately carved - even plates of silver and the odd item of what seemed to be gold. However, as we reached the end of the second room, I came to an abrupt halt. This caused the young woman to yelp in

pain as, still holding my hand, I jarred hard against her pull. I found myself staring into an old mirror hung up against a wall. The mirror was not as flawless as I was used to, so the image was somewhat distorted, but I saw enough to take my breath away. I was transfixed for a second time.

Next to my companion stood a striking young woman of slim build and a little taller than the woman next to her but, nevertheless, of average height. Her face - no - my face, was oval, perfectly proportioned with a rather darker, perhaps swarthier complexion than the English rose that I had studied so intently in the Long Gallery. Like the English rose though, there was a similar long and straight nose and beautiful full lips. I was struck by how flawless her/my skin was. She had a long, slender and elegant neck, her breast creating a gentle swell beneath what I would come to know as a kirtle, which was tightly laced. The eyes were deep and dark, framed by slender arching eyebrows. I felt that it would be easy to get lost in the depths of

those eyes that were both searching and captivating all at the same time. Unlike the stranger next to her, this woman wore no hood but merely a coif, which seemed to catch up an abundance of glossy, thick and dark chestnut hair.

I finally allowed the reality to wash over me, that I **was** this other woman. I gasped almost inaudibly, for about that slender neck was an unmistakable mark of my true identity. Set against a gold chain, was a double strand of pearls from which hung the unmistakable gold 'B' that I had seen in so many portraits before. Could it be possible? I must be dreaming and yet it felt so real, more real than anything I have ever known before. I glanced at my companion who was watching me quizzically. I gripped her hand tightly, just to prove to myself that I really could feel my own physical presence. Confirming this, I hesitantly turned back to gaze once more at my reflection – the reflection I then knew to be Anne Boleyn.

“Come on!” she said. Clearly exasperated from my

dalliance, the young woman dragged me away from the mirror and down a corridor, which I recognised as ‘the Staircase Gallery’, which was added by Thomas Boleyn after the family moved to Hever Castle in 1506. Thomas had turned what had been a slightly outdated early Tudor manor into a bright, warm and fashionable house of its day. The corridor was about three metres wide, clad again in oak panelling. It wrapped itself round the three sides of the building; each inner wall being set with many windows, all of which faced out onto the courtyard. I noticed how the sparkling windowpanes were carved up into small diamonds by the criss-crossing of the lead piping set within them; whilst multi-coloured patches of light were thrown on the floor and walls by the occasional colourful, heraldic design which had been painted onto them at regular intervals.

Much to the annoyance of my companion, I stubbornly halted once more, this time drawn to the open window

which I had spied just less than an hour ago – or was it 500 years into the future – from the courtyard below. I moved slowly toward the window pane, coming to rest each hand lightly on either side of its leaden frame. I hardly dared see the sight that unfolded beneath me as I slowly leaned forward to peer out of the opened window.

In the riot of colour and chaos, I remained unobserved. The noise of chatter, horses' hooves striking the cobbled stone and the clinking of metal stirrups as men moved around, reverberated through the confined space below. Young boys who, by their dress I assumed were servants, rushed around taking sweating horses from lavishly dressed men who were in the process of dismounting their rides. One youngish lad wove his way through the mêlée, delivering flagons of what must have been ale to the men as they dismounted and dusted off their fine clothing from their apparently long and strenuous ride. I watched the men throw back their heads, downing the liquid quickly

and greedily in between their talking and laughing with one another, clearly in high spirits. Elevated high above the crowd, my attention was drawn to a banner of vibrant red, the background to three golden lions with blue claws and tongues emblazoned proudly across it. I noticed how the gold thread caught the light, causing the flag to glisten in the sun; it was the Royal Arms of England.

My gaze then fell upon a larger than life figure, shining brighter than any other in the crowd below. He was clothed head to toe in cloth of gold. I noticed the soft leather riding boots he was wearing, adorned with golden spurs, and the gold-linked collar which hung around his shoulders. A loose leather belt, studded with rubies, was slung at his waist from which hung a sheathed dagger, its handle made of intricately worked silver. A flash of light was caught against a huge and flawless jewel which was clasped by a silver claw at the hilt of the handle. Everything about this man declared his exalted status and wealth. I longed to

see his face. Indeed, it was the first time I laid eyes on Henry. However, the man's broad back remained frustratingly turned toward me, with his head and face obscured by a bejewelled velvet cap, the rim edged with soft, white feathers that danced lightly in the gentle afternoon breeze.

As he exchanged words with another man, who had been standing close by him, a second figure emerged from the main entrance – the one I passed through not too long ago. He was a tall but slim man, elegantly dressed, who greeted his visitor with one arm extended in a sweeping open gesture, whilst the other was folded in front of him as he made a deep and courteous bow. I was unable to hear his words above the general hubbub below, but from his actions, I took this man to be the head of the household. I would later find out that this was indeed Thomas Boleyn, Anne's father.

I was riveted, but before I had a chance to see any more, I

was pulled away from the window and on down the corridor past a huge oak sideboard covered in silver plate. Keeping hold of my hand, the woman swirled around, as she started speaking to someone who was clearly following us. However, I was transfixed by the face of my English Rose. It began to dawn on me that if indeed I was in the body of Anne Boleyn, then the woman who had awoken me in the Long Gallery must surely be Anne's sister, Mary; everything about her dress and her easy familiarity with me told me it was so.

“Bess, can you come and assist me? Mistress Anne needs to be made ready...and quickly!” My English rose kept moving, stepping backwards as she spoke to Bess, all the time steering me toward a large, dark oak door which was left slightly ajar. I glanced backward over my shoulder to see Bess for myself. I was met by the figure of a young woman dressed rather plainly and clearly still in her first flush of youth. She was scurrying after us, her arms laden

with linen. Clearly, she too was giddy with excitement at the King's visit.

In a deep Kentish country accent the maid – and I felt quite certain by her dress that she was a maid - replied. “Yes, Mistress Mary.” With her words, the identity of my companion was confirmed. This pretty, young woman was indeed Mary, Anne’s elder sister. She was beautiful, and I could see why the King had taken her to his bed. Of course, I knew of their affair from history books. With the King clearly here to visit Anne, I assumed that it was now over, yet I detected no hint of jealousy in her manner toward me. I could not help but marvel at her behaviour and wondered if I would be so generous, if I were in her place. At the same time, my mind was frantically trying to remember when this dalliance between the King and Mary Boleyn had ended. I thought that if I could just bring this to mind, I might have an idea of the year that I was in, and of more immediate importance, where Anne was in her

relationship to Henry.

I suppose looking back, I am surprised I did not start laughing at the absurdity of it all. If I had pinched myself hard enough, perhaps I would wake up, come round then spend the rest of the evening confiding my strange and ridiculous adventure to the rest of my eager group. Yet, for some reason, I did not. I seemed stuck there, despite myself, and if the truth be known, beneath the fear was excitement. All my life, since I had fallen for Anne's charms, I, perhaps like every other lover of history, had dreamed of what it would be like, if just for a short while, I could be transported back in time. To be able to see the people whose drama I knew in intimate detail; to speak with them, to ask them about their lives and fill in the gaps left frustratingly blank through documents long lost or destroyed; to know for myself the truth about the people whose reputations had been shaped after their deaths by the personal and political agendas of their contemporaries.

Then, turning her attention to me, the servant girl interrupted my thoughts as she asked, “Mistress Anne, which dress shall I fetch for you?” The young girl with blond hair, caught up in a white linen cap, looked at me expectantly. For a moment, everything seemed to hang in the air, as if time were standing still. My first thought was that I had no idea! Then, before I had a chance to dwell on this any further, I realised that I was speaking boldly and decisively. This was to be the first of many times in the days and months ahead that words would tumble forth without my understanding of from whence they came. Every time this would happen, it seemed as though I was being guided from beyond my understanding by Anne herself. It was from these experiences that gradually over time, I would also come to know more of the real Anne Boleyn. I would begin to see the world through her eyes, feel her passions, her fears, her hopes. I would understand more and more intimately her character, the events that would shape and define her, and her actions which would

leave her essence indelibly marked on the pages of European history.

In that moment, for the first time since I had opened my eyes in this unbelievable world, I felt strangely calm and self assured. I did not quite understand why, after all, I found myself in a strange place; it seemed also that I had arrived in different time! I had travelled back five hundred years to Tudor England and was somehow in the body of Anne Boleyn, whose story and fate I knew well from history books. The King was waiting for me downstairs; I should have been terrified. I knew what Henry was, and would be capable of, in the years to come. Yet, nevertheless, I felt a surge of courage well up from within me. I knew exactly what I must do. For the first time, I took control. Letting go of Mary's hand, I turned toward Bess.

“Bess, bring me my yellow, silk gown and white silk hood – the one with the black velvet veil.” “Very good, Madame”,

with that, Bess gave a slight curtsy and then disappeared through a nearby door. I turned to my sister. “Mary, help me. I need to see my jewels. There must be something that the King has given me that is suitable to wear.” Mary smiled, brimming with excitement.

“Yes, of course. Let's look!” With that she pushed open the heavy oak door and I found myself in a bedroom which I assumed must be my own. A large intricately carved tester bed dominated the room. It was hung with heavily embroidered curtains worked mainly with red, green and silver silk thread, spun in the design of intertwined rose bowers. Crisp, white linen sheets made up the bed which was piled with soft-looking pillows and across which an animal fur had been thrown. As I scanned the room, aside from the imposing bed, the fireplace caught my eye. A simple stone-carved surround mounted above by a finely carved, large wooden panel. Clearly visible was another heraldic device; an inverted

chevron which divided a shield into three sections. Each one contained what looked like a bull's head. I knew this to be the Boleyn family crest. More pictures were hung around the walls of this modest, yet spacious enough room. Half melted candles were positioned here and there. I breathed in deeply; the air was heavily scented with beeswax despite the open window.

Mary was delving deep into a large oak cupboard. With a flourish, she pulled out an ornately carved ivory casket which was mounted with silver bands and hinges; these in turn were embellished with lions and *fleur-de-lis* on a background of translucent blue enamel. It was an exquisite object, the many intricate carvings depicting scenes – I would later learn – from the life of Saint Eustace. Moving over to a dressing table by the window, Mary placed it carefully down on its surface, before handing me a finely crafted golden key, the like of which I had never seen before; in itself it was a rare and beautiful thing. I took it

from her and it fitted easily, turning smoothly in the lock. With a great deal of excitement, for I had no idea what treasures might lie inside, I gingerly opened the lid.

Laid out in the box was an array of necklaces, brooches and rings; a glittering feast of precious and semi-precious stones set in gold. In my modern day life, it was beyond my wildest dreams to think that I might one day hold one of Anne's personal jewels. At that moment though, I realised that an entire casket full lay before me. I was speechless, yet I was drawn immediately to a brooch which displayed clusters of diamonds, studded with pearls and woven into a lover's knot. I felt sure that this had been a gift from The King. However, I hesitantly turned to Mary and tentatively enquired, "and this...do you think...?" I had not even gotten the words out before Mary gushed,

"Oh Anne, you are so clever! Yes, this is the brooch he gave to you at Easter, isn't it?" I smiled, concealing my ignorance, encouraging her to go on. Mary lowered her

eyelids bashfully, as if a little embarrassed to continue. She leaned closer to me and whispered, “He sent it to you after he visited you here, at Hever. Do you remember? It was a gift – to apologise for upsetting you.” Oh God! I thought; Anne's famous sharp tongue. What could I have said, I wondered; what had passed between Henry and me? However, I didn't have to guess for long as my sister eagerly went on, “You were so cross with Henry when he asked you to be his '*Maitresse en titre*' – his sole mistress above all others!” She giggled. Clearly, she found it amusing that her sister could put the King in his place and he, the King, took it so meekly, as an abashed child. “I saw you in the garden with him from my bedroom window. I knew not what you were discussing at the time, but I could just make out through the open window his letter crumpled in your hand, and your fiery chastisement of his disregard for your honour. Even from a distance, I could see the anger flash in your eyes! Henry must have been taken aback by your reaction. I think he was *scared*, you

know!” She emphasised the 'scared' for effect then went on, “Scared that in your anger, you were going to walk away from him, banish him from your company forever! Just think Anne, the King of England scared of my sister. You really do have the courage of a lion. All those wily and ruthless Dukes, Earls and Lords piss in their pants when Henry raises his voice, but not my sister. Oh no, Anne the Lion! The tamer of Kings!” Mary began to swirl round the room, throwing her arms open wide as she spoke. “Do you remember what he said in that letter?” With her head cocked to the side and with a mischievous grin, she mimicked the King, “My dearest sweetheart, I beg you to tell me of your whole mind as to the love between the two of us. I must know! For over a year now, I have been stricken by the dart of love, yet unsure as to how well you doth love me.”

She clasped her hands to her heart feigning the striking of the dart into her breast and continued, “I beg you to let me

know your true feelings for me; whether your love is an ordinary one, as any subject for a King, or do you love me singularly, which indeed is an uncommon love.” Mary was clearly in full flow and had virtually memorised the letter. I wondered if I still had it in my possession. “I beseech you to give me your entire answer, your true and everlasting servant, Henry R.” With the end of her speech came a deep bow, as if to emphasise her mockery of the King's subservience to Anne in the name of true love. Whilst remaining unmoved, she looked up at me, with a moment's silence between us, and then Mary burst out laughing; I couldn't help but join her. It was a blessed relief to give vent to the whirlwind of emotions that were building up within me since waking to find myself remarkably transported back five hundred years into the glorious world of the Tudors.

Too soon, our laughter subsided. Mary was standing close to me. We had been holding onto each other, clasping each

other's arms as we shared our girlish joke. I found myself looking into those gentle, brown eyes. For all her reputation as an 'infamous whore', I saw great tenderness and innocence in those eyes, and I knew that her desire to love and be loved had been cruelly exploited by the powerful men in her life. In my arms, she felt like a vulnerable child, and for a moment, I was angry at the reputation that history had served her. I wanted to protect her. Not for the first time would I want to rewrite the pages of history and it would take me to the very end of the story to surrender this futile quest. Yet, there was something I needed to know from her. Gently wiping away a tear of laughter that moistened her flushed cheeks, I looked intently into her eyes, searching for the truth.

“Mary, tell me. Do you resent me and my relationship with Henry? It must be so difficult for you after...” I trailed off. It seemed indiscreet to be so candid.

Mary smiled feebly and sighed, “Anne, when Henry tired of

me, I cannot deny it, I was heart- broken. He is..." she paused, searching for the right word, "...so very charismatic, and so surprisingly vulnerable at times...when we were alone of course." She added the last part quickly, as if to excuse a perceived weakness. She then continued "He is like no man you or I will ever meet; it is so easy to be enamoured with his intensity, to lay yourself open, to give your heart to him. I was so deeply involved, I forgot myself. I even forgot sometimes that he was the King of England. When we were together, we were just Henry and Mary. I loved him, Anne but I should never have forgotten who he was...and is." She paused, clearly reflecting deeply on the most intimate of times they must have shared together. "Henry is the fire and we are like creatures mesmerised by its light and heat." Mary stared passed me, as if lost in a deep maze of her own thoughts and feelings. Then abruptly, she seemed to come back into the present, remembering once more my presence. "Oh, I'm sorry! Of course, **he loves you** in a way he never

did with me.

He is besotted with you. Everybody at court will soon know it, if they don't already. Everything will be different...just..." again, Mary hesitated, this time unsure as to whether to say her next words, "Just be careful, Anne. Henry is a man of deep passion and shallow pride. Don't lose sight of the shore and get swept away in his changing moods." Mary must have seen something of anxiety registering in my face for she changed tone suddenly. Leaning over and kissing me lightly on the cheek, she took my hands firmly in hers and smiling, said, "Oh look. Don't take any notice of me. After all what do I know! You are the clever one in this family. He loves you. Everything will be fine, you'll see!"

At that moment, the door was pushed open and, with a rustle of skirts, two maids appeared in the room. The first I recognised as Bess, carrying a vibrant yellow gown made of

silk, falling in voluminous folds over her outstretched arms.

The second was slightly older, similarly dressed, although a little more solid in girth. I suspected she had a family of her own and her girth was due to having endured repeated pregnancies. Her demeanour was warm and motherly and I immediately valued her grounded energy. Without further ado, the two women set about unlacing my outer garments.

They worked quietly and swiftly, deeply attentive to their task. Having been undressed down to my undergarments – which I eyed more than a little curiously – the older of the two maids whose name I did not yet know, motioned for me to step into my kirtle and then the full skirt of my new dress. The style of the bodice and the full sleeves that Anne would make so fashionable at the English court were soon slipped about my slight frame, then laced and pinned into place, swiftly and without fuss.

As both maids knelt to straighten the hem of my skirt, ensuring that it fell gracefully around my feet, my sister

stepped forward. I caught myself realising that already she was no longer just Mary Boleyn. She already touched my heart, and I was beginning to understand what it was to have a sister – something I had sadly never known in my 21st century life. Mary helped brush and plait up my hair; this was then covered by a white coif, before affixing into place a white, silk French hood, which had been beautifully studded across the upper and lower billaments with pearls.

Reaching round my neck, she adjusted my Boleyn necklace which I had chosen by my silence to keep about my neck. I realised that already it felt like a talisman that gave me strength, reminding me of who I was. As she worked away, in front of me, Bess held up a small, handled mirror; for only the second time that day, I caught sight of my reflection and saw a fierce determination in the unfamiliar, yet hypnotic, eyes that stared back at me. I remained still, as Mary moved round to my front and attached the lover's knot brooch to the centre of my bodice, beneath the low cut, square neck-line. I would soon learn that this style of gown appeared to be

Anne's favourite. That was not surprising to me, even then; it is how she appeared in all of the few known portraits of her, and I could now see why.

How graceful was her long swanlike neck! How alluring were her well sculpted shoulders and how enticing her raised, small, but perfectly formed breasts! I remembered as I stood there, one of Henry's love letters to Anne, stolen from England and now in the Vatican library; it was the one in which Henry had spoken of kissing Anne's breasts – her 'dugs' – and I wondered if I would feel the King's lips brush across my soft skin that day. To my surprise, I felt a frisson of sexual energy surge through my body. The growing warmth spreading between my legs told me that Anne desired this man - of that I had just become acutely aware

Returning to the present moment, I stood still as I peered into the mirror, biting gently on my lips to flush them red. I had never been afraid of any man; no matter whether that

man was a King or no. I knew full well how to make him swell with desire and gladly shipwreck himself on my shore. If there was such a thing as reincarnation, that we carried forth our personalities into the next lifetime, then on this score, there was no doubt that Anne Boleyn was flowing through my 21st Century veins.

Mary moved over to the dressing table and picked up a glass bottle which was resting there. Within the delicate bottle, was a colourless liquid. Coming towards me, she took off the stopper, tipping the bottle upside down in order to drop a small quantity of the liquid on the tip of her finger. She then touched her finger lightly across either side of my neck; it was perfume. Suddenly, the scent of rosewater – the same scent I detected when I had first entered Anne Boleyn's bedroom – filled my nostrils. Oh Lord! I then realised fully, just how in those minutes before I finally lost consciousness in the Long Gallery, I had already begun the process of crossing over into another time, a parallel

universe. Somehow, in those moments, the rigidly defined boundaries that separated dimensions of time and space had begun to dissolve; the voices that I heard, and the scent of rosewater perfume, had been the first tell- tale signs that part of my consciousness had already transported itself into a different paradigm. I could not even begin to fathom what was happening to me.

Finally, I knew that I was ready; I was prepared to meet the King. For some reason, I was sure of what needed to happen next. I swung round to face Mary. "Sister," I found myself saying as if I had been doing so all of my life! "Help me get out to the rose garden. I need the King to come to me. Help me slip outside, then return to the King with the news that I am taking the air in the garden, unaware of his Grace's arrival; that he will find me there." Mary nodded conspiratorially.

Ushering the maids from the room, I allowed her to lead the way. Deftly, and with much swishing of our skirts, we

glided down the corridor and main staircase. All the time, Mary moved quietly ahead of me, ensuring the way was clear. The most difficult bit had been skirting past the entrance to the Great Hall where many men from the King's party had already gathered. I did not yet know the castle well enough, but later I would realise that Sir Thomas had already guided his honoured guest through to the family's private parlour which lay beyond the far end of the Hall. Finally, Mary and I emerged on a small bridge that led out from the back of the castle. My sister smiled again, that warm and loving smile. Touching my arm gently, she said, "Good Luck, Anne!" and turned to go.

"Mary!" She stopped and turned to look at me once more. "Mary, what is the date today?" She made a puzzled expression, confused as to the relevance of this to the moment in hand; but I had to know. It would make all the difference.

"Why it's May 31st of course!"

“Yes, of course.” What I said next sounded crazy, I know but I had to ask, “...and the year?” “The year! Are you forgetting yourself again, sister?” I shrugged, laughing it off as just random confusion in the stress of the moment. When I continued to look at my sister hopefully, she relented, as if agreeing to play my game. “Very well, if you insist, It's May 31st, 1527. Your birthday! Is not that why the King has come!”

Anne's 26th birthday; I could not believe my ears, and yet I knew that I must hide my shock and excitement; so I smiled back at Mary and said,

“Of course, just a little anxious, that's all.” I was only half lying. To my relief, Mary was shaking her head, laughing to herself; she turned, picking up the hem of her skirts and hurried back into the castle.



I was alone. The sun was high in the sky and cast short shadows, causing the light to dance across the surface of the moat below where I was standing. Emerging from behind the castle, I hurried across the solid wooden bridge that appeared to connect this part of the building to the forest and the rich hunting ground which no doubt lay beyond. No-one seemed to be about. I guessed that everybody was being kept busy inside, feeding and watering the King and his entourage. I imagined Anne's father, my father, taking personal care of the King himself; perhaps discussing latest court politics, or perhaps he was casting about wondering where his younger daughter might be. I imagined Mary arriving in the King's presence with a deep curtsy, explaining that I was taking air in the garden and wondered how long it would be before Henry would come to find me. I hesitated for a moment, looking about me, trying to establish the direction that I should take. It was not difficult though, for not far beyond the moat, lying to the East of

the castle, appeared to be the formal gardens. Gathering up my shimmering skirts, I moved as quickly as I could along a stone path, down three short steps and finally through an arch that had been cut into a mature yew hedge.

Emerging on the other side, I found myself exactly where I had hoped, in the castle's rose garden. It was late May, I knew that now. This explained why the garden was a riot of colour and the fragrance so heavy and sweet that it almost stopped me in my tracks. I imagined one could happily find a quiet corner and bask in the sun whilst getting drunk on the fragrance of roses. The Tudor garden itself was laid out symmetrically as I expected. In the centre, the tinkling of cascading water coming from the stone fountain was the only sound which broke the peaceful tranquility. Set back a little from the main castle, the sound of life thrown into turmoil by the King's unexpected visit faded into the background. I moved forward, deeper into the rose garden and closer to the fountain. The water flowed into a large,

round pond, its sides raised up in carved stone. I had not been there, in Anne's world, for more than half an hour and yet, as Anne Boleyn, I was about to meet the King of England; an absolute monarch and one that was deeply and passionately in love with Anne – with me.

Chapter Two

The Rose Garden,

May 31, 1527

“1527, 1527...think now, think. What was happening to Anne and Henry, to England in 1527,” I murmured to myself. Time was short. Henry, I was sure, would not dally when Mary delivered my message. The more I could remember, the better prepared I would be. I was both terrified and excited. Pacing up and down near the fountain, I racked my brains in an attempt to make use of all the time I had spent reading about Anne's life. “So, in 1527, Anne and Henry's romance was well under way.” I knew from the letter that Mary recounted in my bedroom; that the 'affair' had been at least one year under way. “Henry has already offered Anne the position of *Maitresse en Titre*,” I continued speaking to myself, feverishly recalling every fragment of memory that would come to mind. I also knew

from my history books that Anne vehemently rejected this offer. Offended, she had protested her honour, which she declared would be given only to her future husband. Was she already consciously playing hard to get? I thought so. Anne was no fool. She had seen her sister used and discarded, married off to a younger son with no titles.

By that stage, Anne's earlier love of Lord Henry Percy, the future Earl of Northumberland, had been quashed, without sentiment, by Cardinal Wolsey, possibly on Henry's orders. Anne knew by then that at the very least she was worthy of being a Countess through an advantageous marriage; a mistress she would not be, and frankly, I did not blame her. I knew from painful, personal experience that it was a fool's game. However, there was something else about 1527 that I couldn't quite recall, something significant for Henry and Anne. "Now what is it...?" I was muttering this to myself when a man's voice from behind made me start. "Anne, sweetheart, you are talking to yourself again!"

I was deep in thought, my eyes cast down and my back turned to the entrance to the rose garden. Without knowing it, the King had crept up on me much sooner than I had anticipated. Forcing myself to breathe deeply and remain calm, I slowly turned my head to look at him. Not three metres away from where I was standing was Henry VIII, King of England. Of course, it could have been nobody else. Not only had I seen this man's face staring down defiantly at me from so many Holbein portraits, but in truth, this *could* be nobody else. This man radiated majesty. I have never experienced such an overwhelming and magnetic energy emanating from one human being. He was a giant, a truly magnificent sight; utterly resplendent that day in cloth of gold as I had seen him earlier in the courtyard of the castle. He still wore his riding boots; feet slightly askance, his right hand resting lightly on the hilt of his dagger which was slung low from a silken sash. His hands were covered in a myriad of rings, fat with diamonds, rubies and other precious stones. Gradually, as my eyes moved upwards, I took in

every inch of the man standing before me. His girth was not that of a slim young man. However, nor was he the bloated, obese King I knew he was to become toward the end of his life. As my gaze reached his shoulders, my eyes must have widened involuntarily, for they were probably near twice the size of my own slight frame and sporting the same gold collar that I spotted earlier from the first floor window of the castle. What I had not truly appreciated from that distance was how ornately and intricately the gold had been worked into what looked like a 'barley-twist', studded with pearls, with a gold mount spaced every ten centimetres or so, holding variously coloured precious gems, huge rubies and diamonds. I had never seen such wealth worn by one person.

Finally, my line of sight alighted upon Henry's face which was large and round, although beneath his reddish-brown beard, I distinctly made out a strong, square jaw line. His complexion, I noted, was slightly flushed around his cheeks which were full; his eyes, small, bright blue and piercing. I

understood well how they might be able to fix a person during one of his legendary rages and leave them wishing they were somewhere else indeed! Yet right there, in that rose garden at Hever, I saw none of this ferocity. Henry's small mouth was spread into a huge, warm smile. He was chuckling at catching me out talking to myself; I felt sure of that - it amused him.

It was his eyes above all else that I remember most during that first meeting, for they were alive with love and unrequited passion. In that moment, I knew that I meant the world to Henry, and that he would turn his kingdom upside down to have me as his own. I also understood how unjustly Anne had been condemned for causing all that would later happen – the break from Rome and the Reformation. Of course, she had her part to play. Anne was never to be anyone's puppet. However, Henry's attentions and desires had fixed on Anne at some point, and she could no more deny her physical appeal than Henry could his majesty. Now

that Henry's desires were becoming clear, most of all to himself, with his power and charisma, nothing in the world would be able to stop him from ultimately having his way.

Perhaps another woman might have fallen into a deep and gracious curtsy at the sight of her King, but I stood tall. I was acutely aware of how gracefully and regally Anne carried her own body. With my chin held high, I could not help but smile defiantly at my suitor. However, I found myself gracefully inclining my head and in a clear, strong, yet alluring voice, Anne spoke through me,

“Your Grace is most welcome back at Hever. It is indeed an honour for us that you should visit us again – and so soon.”

Then – and I could not believe my own audacity - I cocked my head to the side playfully and said,

“Perhaps Your Grace left something precious behind after your last visit?”

Henry roared with laughter! “Anne you are a tease and a minx and I have never met another woman like you!” I was surprised by the lightness of the King's voice; his frame left you expecting a deeper, more resonant tone. He moved in closer to me, holding my gaze intently. Taking my fine and dainty hand in his, he lifted it up and brushed my fingers with his lips. Without allowing my hand to fall, he spoke, this time earnestly, “Anne, mine own sweetheart, you are right I did forget something and I have come to put it right.”

All I heard in the stillness of that moment was the sound of the skylarks way above our heads, as they warbled sweet songs on the wing; a lazy bee buzzed close by as it made its way from flower to flower. “I asked you to be my mistress and I see now you were right. If I truly honoured you, then I could not ask you to give your maidenhead to me; for I am not your husband.” He let go of my hand and I found myself automatically clasping both of them together in front of my stomach which was fluttering with nervous

excitement. I had no idea where this was going, but Henry continued as he paced up and down next to me. All the while, I remained still, allowing him to talk.

“I have taken much council and looked into these matters deeply myself... into my own conscience, you understand.” He paused, turning to look at me momentarily, waiting for my acknowledgement, which I duly provided with a slight smile and nod of my head. “I see now that my marriage to Katherine is unclean and therefore invalid in the eyes of God. I took my brother's wife in good faith but as you well know, we have no sons. Anne, I have reflected much on the words in Leviticus and I see now that in taking my brother's wife I have sinned against God. For my conscience sake, I cannot remain in this marriage.”

Now, I pressed forward slightly turning to face him again. “What are you saying, Henry?” I almost gasped. I dared to use the King's Christian name but perhaps this had been common parlance for some time because Henry did not

bat an eyelid but continued speaking. This time, he motioned for me to walk alongside him, placing his arm about my shoulder. He was so close to me, I smelt his musky maleness; I also felt small but deeply protected in his arms.

“Anne, I have decided to press forward with an annulment of my marriage to Katherine. I have already instructed some of my councillors to make discreet enquiries as to how *We* should best proceed. I intend to petition the Pope to release us both from this sin.”

“Oh.” Was all I managed to say, even though I realised that I sounded somewhat feeble. A knot had been forming deep in my stomach. I had a growing feeling I knew what was coming next. Henry cut through my thoughts.

“Sweetheart, I have a mind to take a new wife, for England needs a male heir.” He paused. “I love you Anne and I would like *you* to be my wife. I want you to be my queen.”

I stopped dead. Clutching onto Henry's hand, my legs almost gave way and I just managed to prevent myself sinking to the ground. I knew what Henry was about to ask me, but I was there, hearing it for myself, experiencing the moment of Anne's first triumph; the moment in which they would agree to marry. I was overwhelmed by the sense that it was in this moment that Anne's destiny had been decided, the real beginning of the path that would set her on the throne of England and ultimately facing a swordsman from Calais. Perhaps I had the chance at that moment to save her life, to say 'no' to the King and marry elsewhere. But 'elsewhere' was not Anne. She was a character destined to take centre stage at whatever cost. Yet for Anne's sake, I tried so hard to say 'no' to Henry, to run from the garden and from my fate. But fate was already drawing me forward and the words of refusal would not come.

“Oh, dear God! Do you mean it, Henry?” was all that I was able to gasp. The King smiled and nodded; then I

heard myself saying ‘yes, yes’ over and over with tears streaming down my face. I was not sure whether those tears were of joy, or of sadness, but I found myself being pulled into my lover's embrace. Henry was laughing again as he held me tight against his huge chest. I never wanted that moment to end. It was impossible back then to believe that this man would ever betray me. When I finally looked up and met his gaze, to my surprise, I found that Henry too had tears welling up in his eyes. For a few intimate and perfect moments, we stood there like two frightened teenagers, clasping onto each other as if this would somehow protect us from the coming storm.

I imagined that Henry believed that with his word would follow the deed easily enough. He could not possibly know, as I did, that this would be an historic love which would tear apart the very fabric of this country, dividing loyalties and creating factions that would be prepared to fight to the death. An immense sense of destiny swelled up within my

chest. In my other world, I lived an entirely ordinary life, yet I now tasted, as Anne must have done, what it was to feel extraordinary; thrust forward to become the very making of history. It would not be the last time that I would be unable to shake off the thought that perhaps Anne had known her destiny after all because she and I, the two ‘Annes’ were caught up in an endless cycle; our lives, our fates intimately entwined. Perhaps she had known her destiny because that person I had read about in the history books had, at least in some part, been me; the woman from the future who knew already what had to be done; and knew what would be done! However, there was no more time to dwell on this uncomfortable and perplexing thought because Henry took me by the hand and was leading me back toward the entrance to the rose garden.

“Let us rejoin the others. There is much to celebrate, but...” with this Henry turned to face me. His smile replaced with a serious countenance, “this must remain a secret for now. Katherine does not yet know and I do not

want her to know. I want her to hear from my advisors which way the wind blows – how *We* may best accomplish our goal.” His face softened once more. “Sweetheart, we shall soon be together and then the whole world will know of the fire that you have lit in my heart – and you will be adored, as I adore you.”

“Of course, Henry. I understand and will keep it close to mine own heart and none shall know of it.” I noticed how strangely I spoke and yet, curiously it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

“Then all will be well.” Henry opened out his arm, gesturing for us to move on. Curiously, as we walked arm in arm, I was amazed to see a group of people milling around by the entrance to the rose garden. I was so utterly lost in the moment with Henry that I completely failed to realise that we were not alone.

A group of at least fifteen people gathered ahead of us.

Some were clearly part of Henry's personal bodyguard, dressed in royal livery; the Tudor colours of green and white. Each one carried a halberd, glistening in the bright midday sun; sheathed swords were slung by their sides. Of the others, Mary alone I recognised. She was standing next to an older woman who was studying me intently. A few feet away from her and talking to two other men, who were equally richly adorned, was the man who had greeted Henry on his arrival at Hever; the man I assumed to be my father. The remainder of the group were mostly men, all dressed elegantly and clearly of some wealth. Some were engaged in their own conversations, others eyed Henry and me. As we drew nearer, all turned their attention to us and bowed or curtsied in deference to the King. Henry held their undivided attention as he spoke heartily,

“Friends, let us take to the hunt this afternoon, for it is a fine day indeed! Thomas, have your stable boys prepare fresh horses.”

“Yes, Sire, straight away.” Sir Thomas, who I now knew to be my father, turned and nodded to a rather more plainly dressed man lingering at the back of the crowd who promptly scuttled off, no doubt to convey the King’s orders to the stables. Henry walked forward, the crowd melting away to allow our passage through. As we reached the woman standing next to Mary, Henry paused, then spoke to her merrily, “Lady Elizabeth, your daughter shall join me in the hunt today and fear not, for when we return we will have hearty appetites, so make good for our dinner. We have much desire to make merry this evening!” Lady Elizabeth nodded her head. I noticed how she, like all the other ladies, cast her eyes downwards, almost afraid to hold the gaze of the King. I saw straight away how Anne must have stood out to Henry; no shy diminutive flower was she; her proud stance, her head held high, unafraid of her King. Henry must have seen her as a wild animal, mysterious, elusive and difficult to hold; in short, a challenge that any alpha male would relish.

With Henry's words, I realised that this lady must be my mother, Elizabeth Boleyn. In my modern life, the question of Anne's mother always intrigued me. For many years, so little had been written about her in relation to Anne that I assumed, wrongly, that she must have been dead by the time Anne caught Henry's eye. However, from one of Henry's love letters to Anne, begging her to come to court, I found the reference to 'my Lady, your mother' and realised that Elizabeth was very much alive and probably played the role of chaperone on many occasions. I often wondered how Elizabeth had felt about the courtship of her daughter by the King of England: Proud? Excited? In awe? Fearful? What happened to her during and after Anne's downfall? Had she pleaded with the King for the life of her two children?

I later learnt she had been close to Anne, and no doubt must have been heart-broken when tragedy had befallen her children. Was it indeed of a broken heart that

Elizabeth died less than two years later? And what became of her relationship with Thomas? Did she blame him? I knew that after her death, Elizabeth was buried in the Howard family vaults in St. Mary's Church, Lambeth, close to the then London residence of that most noble of Tudor families. Elizabeth was, of course, a Howard girl before her marriage to the aspiring courtier, Thomas Boleyn. I would never know, but it seemed to me that following Anne's death and that of her son, George, Elizabeth had fallen out with Thomas. Did she perhaps blame him for putting their family in the way of a lion who would ultimately tear them apart? I imagined her screaming at him for this ambition and his apathy in trying to save them in order to save his own skin. Perhaps she could never forgive him his unbridled ambition; or forgive herself for not attempting to save them. I thought of her sobbing tears of desperate grief. In her all-consuming sorrow, unable to tolerate the sight of him, I imagined her leaving Thomas and moving back to the Howard family home to nurse her memories and her

broken spirit.

As Henry and I passed her, I wanted my mother to look up so I could see her face up close, but before I could, we moved along, heading back into the castle to prepare for the hunt.

Chapter Three

The Hunt,

May 31 1527

Preparations for the hunt were those of bustling efficiency. No sooner had we re-entered the castle, than I was swept away from the company of the King and back up to my bedroom. The same two maids that had prepared me not half an hour earlier awaited my arrival. As I entered the room, I found them bustling around the bed where they had carefully laid out my hunting attire for my inspection and approval. Of course, they were completely unaware that their mistress was now a Queen-in-waiting. Bess and the older lady, who by then I knew as Alice, quickly stripped me of my shimmering golden gown and dressed me in the attire that I would wear for the hunt. This time a kirtle of lightweight wool, lined with linen and trimmed along its

edge with green velvet, was overlaid by a dark green English gown of Russell Satin; the satin sleeves were puffed at the top and gathered at the elbow, from whence narrow, velvet sleeves ran close fitting to my wrists. This outer gown was beautifully decorated with a trim of green velvet ribbon, edged in gold cord, whilst it was fastened at the front with jewelled aiglets, a green silk sash being tied about my waist. My French hood was also removed and a new pearl edged coif and black velvet bonnet pinned in its place, the latter dressed elegantly with a fine, white ostrich feather. It seemed so strange at first, to be so fussed over and dressed as if I were a child. However, I very quickly came to appreciate the intricacies of the many buttons, hooks and lacings, which drew my dresses together and I understood it would be impossible to have dressed in such rich attire on my own. I stood patiently waiting for my maids to complete their task. All the while, I heard around me the hubbub of the castle, alive with anticipation. Emanating upwards through the open window was, yet again, the sound

of the clatter of hooves as fresh horses were brought in from the stables. Prancing about, they too seemed anxious to get going. Alice came forward, holding a pair of ankle-length, leather riding boots. With Bess supporting me, she slipped each one over my stockings. Each boot was then buckled into place before finally, Alice turned to me and offered me my riding gloves; I smiled at both my maids feeling somewhat apprehensive. The party was gathering downstairs and I knew it was time to go.

“Thank you.” I said finally.

“Enjoy the hunt, Madame. May your efforts be fruitful!”

With that, Bess moved to the door, holding it open for me to pass through.

Having now gone through the house on a couple of occasions, I was beginning to get my bearings. I managed to find my way quite easily to the main staircase and started to make my way down to the Entrance Hall below. Below

me, the hunting party had gathered. It was not the entire retinue, perhaps 8 to 10 people, all told. With the exception of Mary and one other lady, whom I did not yet know, all who gathered were men. I guessed that the King had finally decided upon a more intimate group, and I wondered who these people were. Undoubtedly, as the King's close companions and confidant, I would know many of them from my history books, but it was impossible at the time to guess who was who. I had to keep my wits about me; no doubt eavesdropping on idle chatter would reveal a great deal.

As I glided down the staircase, I noticed all eyes were turning toward me. I wondered if that was the effect Anne had on people when she entered a room. She was renowned for her 'behaviour, manners and attire which excelled them all'. Clearly, she turned heads; people could not help themselves. With the clear attention and favour of the King, no doubt this added to the intoxicating allure of her presence. As I reached the bottom of the stairs, some

of those present inclined their heads, acknowledging my arrival. The King, who had been in jovial conversation with a couple of men, saw me and broke off his conversation immediately, as he extended his arm to take my hand.

“Mistress Anne. Now we are complete.” Then, turning to the room Henry said, “Let us away and tarry no more!” To me he leaned in close and whispered, “And you shall ride by my side, sweet-heart. I may be hunting a buck this day, but you, I do not want out of my sight.”

With that, the party swept outside. I could not believe that just a couple of hours earlier at most, I had walked in to this castle as plain, unremarkable Anne. Now, I was leaving through the same entrance, following the King of England as Mistress Anne, the King’s secret fiancée and future Queen.

In front of me, the small courtyard was crowded indeed. The horses were bedecked with fine leather saddles, set off with

brightly polished fittings. Several stable hands held onto the reins of two or three horses each, as they awaited the arrival of their mounts. As the men, including Henry, were assisted effortlessly into their saddles, I was escorted to my ride, a beautiful black stallion, its forehead ablaze with a white star. I thanked my lucky stars that as a small girl, I had not only fallen in love with Anne Boleyn but also with horses. I virtually grew up with them in my blood, and on a couple of occasions even rode side saddle; so I knew at least how to mount my horse! A strong looking groom stepped forward and offered me his locked hands into which I placed my foot. I was always a slight thing and lifted easily into the saddle, locking my right knee around its fixed head and adjusting my left foot in the wide stirrup. I turned the horse around and was delighted to find that he was responsive to my touch. I felt sure that I had ridden him before and that we shared an understanding.

I soon found myself at Henry's side. The King met my eyes

and smiled, lighting up my heart. He lifted his right arm and motioned for us to move forward, and the party set off. The Royal Standard - carried by a lone rider –fluttered in the breeze behind Henry and me, whilst our escort, a number of armed guards and servants, followed up the rear. At first, we set off at a brisk trot, making our way across the drawbridge then left down a dusty and deserted lane, which seemed to head off into the forest. It had gone midday and was hot by then. The hard, stony baked earth below our horses' hooves told me that there must have been little rain for some considerable time. We passed only a few people as we made our way along, but those we did must have recognised the Royal Standard and the exalted position of the noblemen that passed by, for all doffed their caps and bowed low. I smiled down at them but they respectfully never met my gaze.

We soon entered the forest, kept much cooler than the open countryside by the emerald canopy above us. It was

truly a perfect summer's day with light falling in dappled pools on the forest floor. Birds chirped and swooped around us as they flitted from tree to tree, feeding their chicks. Occasionally, I caught sight of a red squirrel darting across the boughs above our heads, and rabbits disappearing from view into the thick undergrowth on the forest floor. I was struck by how quiet it was. With the exception of some gentle banter, the sound of the horses scuffling their way along the stony path and the clinking of the metal fittings of the horses' bridles, there was silence. How I often longed to escape the noise pollution of the 21st century in my other life, and there I was; no cars or trains ploughing across our countryside, no airplanes roaring through the sky. It was bliss.

Henry interrupted my reverie. "Anne, my love, you know this forest well. Where do you reckon to be the best chance of hunting down a stag?" We halted at an intersection of five paths. In truth, I had no idea which way to go for sure, but I

was drawn toward a path ahead which bore slightly to the right, heading deep into the forest. I turned, flashing a mischievous smile at Henry. I noticed how, as Anne, I lowered my eyes fixing my paramour from behind my eyelashes before I spoke.

“My Lord, I think you will find the best hunting to be this way!” With that, I whipped around and brazenly urged my horse forward to a full gallop, hurtling down the winding track and away into the forest. I half expected in that moment to hear Henry’s thunderous roar call me back for my impudence. Instead, all I heard was a sudden crack of the whip as the King let out a ”Ha!” and drove his palfrey forward in hot pursuit.

The wind whipped past my cheeks, my full skirts billowed around my legs and backwards over my horse’s hindquarters. I felt sure of myself in the saddle. I was in no doubt that Anne was an expert horsewoman and had been well taught in the art. She had been groomed for moments

like this and now shone brightly, eclipsing all. Of course, with the King on the move, the entire party followed us apace, but none could keep up with Henry and me as we sped along the forest track, the dried earth thrown up in clouds of dust behind us as we went.

Suddenly, Henry caught up with me and grabbed the reins of my horse, bringing us to an abrupt stop. I jolted in fear; perhaps he was truly angry with me and my brazen behaviour. However, my fears were just as quickly allayed, as I noticed him raising his arm again to halt the rest of our party which had finally made up the lost ground. Almost in the same movement, he looked at me, placing his finger on his lips and urging me to silence. Letting go of my reins, he pointed ahead with his gloved and bejewelled left hand, indicating toward something lying ahead of us under the cover of the undergrowth. I strained in my saddle, trying to follow the line of his finger. Just a flicker of movement gave it away to me, although Henry - a superb huntsman - needed much less. A magnificent stag was some fifty

metres in front of us, alone on the edge of a forest clearing. Our arrival though had alerted him to our presence, and he was warily eyeing up our group, muscles twitching in his flanks, preparing him for flight. Henry slowly reached for his bow and arrow, which was in a pouch at the side of his saddle but at that moment, spooked by his movement, the stag leapt forward into the thicket. The chase was on. In a fleeting moment, Henry spurred his horse on with an excited battle cry. Galloping at full tilt, this time with me following him, we ducked and wove our way at break-neck speed along the path, hurtling through the forest after our prey. The chase must have gone on for 15 or 20 minutes before exhausted, the stag slowed its pace ahead of us. Henry seized the moment, still moving forward at a canter, he let go of the reins, steering the horse with his legs and taking up his bow and arrow, shot the deer square in the flank and close to its heart. The animal fell straight to the ground. In seconds we were upon him. Henry, aglow with the adrenaline of the chase, jumped down from his horse

to inspect the kill. I could not help but feel sorry for that stag. Henry had pursued it to the point of its surrender, and I thought of Anne, of myself, being drawn to the same fate.

The stag was still breathing, albeit in its death throes. The King turned to one of the gentlemen who was close to my side. He held out his hand, indicating for something, which I guessed was a knife, to finish off the beast. The man at my side, dismounted his horse swiftly, unsheathed the dagger held at his side, and handed the hilt to Henry. Another gentleman also dismounted and moved in closer to the King, who, by then, was kneeling next to the animal's body. With one swift motion, Henry cut its throat.

As most of our number had dismounted their horses and gathered round the dead stag, congratulating the King on his prowess and skill, I failed to notice that my father, Sir Thomas Boleyn had drawn up his horse on my right hand side. Some metres back from the fallen stag, we found ourselves out of earshot of the main party. It was the first

time that I had been alone with Anne's father, and I finally had a chance to see him close up.

Thomas Boleyn was a slim man of average height. Like Anne, he had an elongated, oval face and the Boleyn nose; long and straight. His mouth was full and his chin was quite pointed. He shared Anne's high cheek bones, but whilst they added drama to Anne's face, they left Sir Thomas looking rather drawn; and although his neck was thick set, he had a clearly pronounced Adam's apple. Thomas's eyes were large and a deep chestnut-brown in colour, just like my sister Mary's. However, unlike my sister, I could presently see no great softness in those eyes, but rather shrewd ambition. His whole face was framed by a thick mass of wavy brown hair, flecked through with grey and cut straight across at the level of his jaw bone.

I estimated Anne's father to be in his mid-forties, well into middle age by Tudor standards. Thomas was dressed head to toe in black. His doublet and breeches were made

from rich black damask; the latter slashed at the sleeves showing his fine, white linen shirt beneath. The doublet was fastened at the neck, the standing collar beautifully embroidered with blackwork. A brooch pinned on the garment at the base of Sir Thomas's neck had a gold mount sporting a large black stone surrounded by diamonds. Finally, thigh-high, black leather riding boots were trimmed with silver spurs and like the King, he wore black leather riding gloves and several gold rings studded with precious stones. As was customary for all the men, a dagger, this time with an ornately engraved steel hilt, was slung loosely from a leather belt at his side.

My father leaned forward, speaking quietly so that only I could hear. "What of the King?

What did he say to you back in the rose garden?"

I nearly laughed! So my father did not yet know of the King's intentions toward me. Henry meant it then, when

he said it was a secret. However, this was my father, and I felt duty bound to reveal the King's promise to his daughter.

Turning my horse, so that my back was partly toward the King and his party, I too spoke in hushed tones, my head bowed so that others were not able to see my lips as I spoke. "The King is seeking an annulment from Katherine," I noticed that I was not inclined to call her 'Queen', preferring instead to use her Christian name. "He seeks a new wife and has asked me to be his bride." With those last few words, I raised my head again to look at my father whose face, by that time, was breaking into an uncharacteristic, if not slightly Machiavellian smile.

"Is he indeed? Then this is the making of you Anne – of our family. It is our destiny – to provide a lineage of Kings." His eyes sparkled as he busied himself calculating all that was to be gained by our good fortune. "I presume you said, 'yes'" he said with a slight irony, as if there could

be no other answer; as if he expected no other reply from his fiery and headstrong youngest daughter.

Suddenly, I found myself both proud of what Anne had achieved – to be loved to distraction by a great Prince, and at the same time irritated that my father could be so blind to the dangers that I knew lay ahead. I realised in that moment that I carried great affection for him, but was also aware that I was not so sure that Anne entirely trusted him.

“The King said that this is as yet a secret. He has asked his advisors to explore the best way to approach the case. Katherine does not yet know.” I turned my horse back to the main party. The servants who accompanied us were busy collecting up the stag so that we might take it back to the castle. The King caught my gaze and I beamed at him, truly awed by his performance in the saddle, the likes of which I had never seen before. He looked like a small boy in that moment; his face shining with pride, seeking my approval and recognition of his prowess.

Following the exchange between Henry and me, Sir Thomas continued, "Tonight we will indeed make merry. We will celebrate without words and keep our own council of this great blessing until the King makes it known you are to be his new Queen." I looked back at him, holding my horse steady.

"Father, think not that this will be an easy path. There will be many twists and turns beyond our current knowing." This I said from my knowledge of history. I wanted to temper his ambition and warn him of what lay ahead. Then I added, "Katherine will not go quietly. You know how stubborn she is!" This too had come from my reading, but also strangely from a sense of personal experience that again welled up from within me. I realised that Anne knew this woman well. Not surprising, of course, as I remembered that Anne had been in service to Katherine as a maid in waiting for several years. Henry now made use of the convenience of her position, which afforded them

greater opportunities to see each other more often; the young, charismatic mistress-to-be right under the nose of the older queen. In my modern life, I had some experience of being vilified as the ‘other woman’ but never had I dreamt of what it might be like to have to live in close quarters with ‘the wife’. This was not a recipe for happy families – but this was no ordinary family.

“Anne, it is true, others will be jealous of our good fortune. The Duke of Suffolk for one, and there will be more; the Montagues, the de La Poles, those who are loyal to Katherine, as well as older families who will see us as upstarts, reaching beyond our station. But your Uncle Norfolk will see the benefits of this alliance with the King; with the leading nobleman in the land behind you, all will be well. When you are Queen and have borne the King his son, your position will be unassailable.” A courtier came close by on his horse, causing my father to break off discreetly and talk to the young man.

I was exasperated. Mixed emotions weighed heavily upon me. On the one hand, I wanted to be in this extraordinary moment, basking in the love and adoration of so mighty and charismatic a prince. On the other, I could not forget what I already knew. I saw danger lurking where they only saw riches, I saw enemies lining up in every shadow, and I knew not how to change history. Already there was a momentum building that began to sweep us along.

Having cleaned his hands of the stag's blood, Henry remounted his horse, which he then manoeuvred toward me. As he approached me, I said, "Sire, I am clear amazed at your skill in the hunt!" I did not lie.

"Anne, sweetheart, do you remember the first gift I sent you; the young buck I killed in the forest near Greenwich?" I smiled demurely and nodded. He came right up next to my horse; he leaned over and whispered softly in my ear so that none but I could hear what he said. "Then let the

blood of this stag be spilled in your honour, a sign of my undying commitment to you, our love and our life together.”

Once more he took my hand, which was resting on my right thigh, and kissed it gently whilst holding my gaze with intense desire. I could not help but be struck by the contrast of the brute strength and savagery that he used in killing the stag, and the sweet tenderness he always seemed to bear toward me.

The King then turned to the group again. “The afternoon is yet young, my friends. Let us continue the hunt!” Henry led the way, as together, our merry band headed off further into the forest.



I returned from the hunt, bone-weary and exhausted. Covered in dust from the roadside and sweating from the afternoon heat, I was uncomfortably sticky beneath the

many layers of my clothing. When I reached my bedroom, I asked Bess to prepare me a bath. Slightly puzzled – for clearly this was not a common request - Bess and Alice set about the task with their usual quiet efficiency. I sank onto the bed whilst they brought in a large wooden tun and lined it with linen sheets. Then running backwards and forwards, they bustled about industriously, in order to fill the bath with hot water from the kitchen. Hot bricks placed inside the tun had kept the water warm, whilst Bess had thoughtfully pinned posies of sweet, dried flowers and herbs to the linen in order to infuse their heady perfume through the steamy water.

I could hardly move; I was so weary from the exhilaration of the afternoon. Still lying across the bed, I turned my head lazily to gaze out of the nearby window at the flawless blue sky above. The afternoon sun had begun its slow descent, although its warmth continued to fill the air with the sweet scent of honeysuckle and the fragrance

from the climbing rose that grew directly outside my open window.

The castle was more subdued after our exertions; whilst the servants had mastered the many demands of its swollen numbers. The lords and ladies of the King's retinue, indeed the King himself, retired for a couple of short hours before the evening revels were set to begin. "Mistress, your bath is ready," Bess said.

"Thank you". I dragged myself up from the bed before each layer of my clothing was finally, and gratefully, peeled away. With the last petticoat removed, I found myself naked. With some amusement, I realised I was not wearing any underwear. Although entirely strange to me, clearly this was the norm as neither Bess nor Alice seemed surprised. I looked down at my slim, yet curvaceous body. I was delicate and well proportioned; my breasts were pert and whilst not large, were certainly full enough to please a man. I stepped into the bath, sinking down into the water.

Bess knelt beside me and began to wash my back.

Suddenly, I felt an overwhelming desire to be alone. In my modern existence, I lived on my own and was used to my own space. Since arriving in that strange and foreign world, I realised that I had not been left alone for one minute. It was something that I would well get used to in the months ahead, but back then I had needed time, and space, to think.

I turned to Bess as Alice had already left the room. “Could you leave me, Bess?” I said with a slight, consoling smile. Bess looked vaguely confused, but did not object. Rising, she bobbed a curtsey then quietly left the room.

Finally, I was alone. So many questions that I had brushed aside since I had awoken in the Long Gallery tumbled back through my mind. I leant forward bringing my knees up to my chest, hugging them, and enjoying, just for one moment, the warmth of the water melting away the

tension in my aching muscles. I rested my chin on my knees and began to sort through my thoughts. The first question on my mind was, 'how on earth did I get here and how would I get back?' If this wasn't a dream - and it seemed increasingly unlikely that it wasn't - then how had I entered this reality? No-one noticed any change in Anne. So was I Anne, was Anne me? I mean, did we share the same soul? I knew something of the weird and wacky world of quantum physics; certainly enough to know that in the 21st century many of the world's leading quantum physicists believed that parallel universes most likely existed; that all possibilities and realities were taking place simultaneously, that we are all ultimately "souls" constrained neither by time or place. In other words, was it possible that I was actually in both dimensions at the same time?

Another, more disturbing thought followed. Did I want to go back? The truth was that despite my professional success,

my personal life had been less than a triumph. Some five years before, I had met and fallen in love with a man who, inconveniently, happened to be married with a family. We were soul mates, Daniel and I. Unfortunately, the heady excitement of those early days soon faded into despair as we both realised that he was unable to break up a family which included his young daughter. However, from our suffering, a deeper and stronger love emerged which endured despite the enormously trying circumstances. The relationship with his wife, like Henry's with Katherine, was cordial; now no more than brotherly affection. Yet that did not make our time apart any easier, and although I got on with my life, I died inside living without him. We promised ourselves to each other – in time– when his daughter was more independent. But he was a devoted father, and I knew our love was tearing his sense of loyalties apart.

The irony and parallel with Anne's situation did not fail to pass me by unnoticed. However, suddenly I had found

myself living her life. It was almost as if I could escape into a fantasy and allow Daniel to go back to his family, whilst I could lose myself in a different story and forget, at least for the time being, about unhappy endings. Yes, it is true; during those early days, I rather ridiculously believed that I could single-handedly change the course of history; that Anne would live happily ever after. Deep in thought, I watched the reflection of myself in the water. A small knock at my bedroom door abruptly broke my daydream. I looked up as the oak door creaked open slowly, and Elizabeth Boleyn entered the room alone.

“May I come in child?” her voice was soft and filled with tenderness. I immediately relaxed. This was my mother, and I already sensed Anne loved her dearly. My intuition told me that there was a close and intimate bond between the two of them and I immediately felt safe.

“Of course, mother,” was my immediate reply. Elizabeth Boleyn came over and knelt just as Bess had done only a

few minutes before. She too began washing my neck and back. Finally, my mother was close by my side and I turned my head to see her face in detail. Elizabeth Boleyn had clearly been a very handsome woman in her younger years. About the same age as her husband, some of her youth and beauty had faded. However, in her maturity, she had retained her striking looks and possessed considerable elegance and grace. I saw immediately where Anne had got her famed allure and poise. Unlike Anne though, Elizabeth's face was more round than oval; her cheeks were somewhat full but she had the same flawless, rather swarthy complexion as her daughter. I could not help but notice the dark mole high on her left cheek bone as it drew one's attention to her beautiful eyes, which were large, round and hazel-green in colour and at that moment, they were full of concern and love for her daughter. Elizabeth's dark hair was parted in the centre and swept back, tucked beneath her French hood. I noticed that there was no sign of the flecks of grey that I had seen earlier in her husband's

thick head of hair.

Like her husband, Anne's mother was clothed in a rich fabric of black damask, which contrasted against her kirtle of light grey satin. Although her bodice had been cut squarely, she modestly wore a white, very fine, linen partlet which was secured about her neck by a small button. Following the neckline of her gown, there were tiny, delicate and decorative jewels, which looked to me like buttons, but later I learnt were called 'ouches', whilst about her waist, I noticed a small book clipped to the end of a gold chain. Knowing the religious convictions of the time, I assumed this to be Lady Elizabeth's Book of Hours. Overall, it seemed that Elizabeth dressed more conservatively than either her husband or her two daughters. Yet clearly, she was a proud woman of a quiet and steely disposition who I sensed was fiercely protective of her children. For a few moments we stayed there in silence together, enjoying the sense of closeness between us. It

was my mother who broke the silence first.

"Your father has told me about what the King has said," my mother's voice was quiet and understated, and yet I detected her anxiety. "Anne, if truth be known child, I'm afraid for you. Our King is a mighty Prince and a generous sovereign Lord, but he is also a man of fickle mood. I am proud of you, truly, but I cannot get it out of my mind; if Henry can put aside his first wife of over twenty years, a Spanish princess with the noblest connections throughout Europe, what might he do if..." Her voice trailed off, unable to put words to her fears. She could not know it, but of course I understood her concerns entirely. Indeed I shared them. Yet I did not know a way out the situation that I found myself in. The best I could do in that moment was to try and assuage her fears. I shifted in the water, turning more fully to face her square on. Taking her small hands in my own, I squeezed them tightly and looked deep into her eyes.

"Dearest mother, I understand your concerns, the thing is..."

I searched around for the right words to say, "I know that this is my destiny. For some reason I am meant to be Henry's wife and Queen of England." I continued by appealing to her deep religious convictions. "God has brought me to this, you know that don't you." I looked earnestly and deeply into those gentle hazel-green eyes, punctuating each word with a slight squeeze of her hands in mine. "It is God's will that I accept Henry's offer - and you taught me that above all else, I must accept the will of God and love the will of God as my own." I only guessed that this had been the case from the prayer book at her side, I also knew that I was unlikely to be wrong. "Now mother, let us be glad of these many blessings. I'm going to need all your love and support in the years to come. Do not forsake me now. Be of good, stout heart my dearest, sweetest and most kind mother." With the end of my speech, my mother reached up with her hands and gently cupped my face within them. She smiled, tears welling up in

her eyes.

"Yes, you are right, of course you are right my beautiful, irreplaceable daughter." My mother raised herself up to her feet, her hand lingering on my cheek for just a moment. "I shall send the maids up to make you ready for this evening," she said. She then smiled at me before walking to the door; opening it, Lady Boleyn turned to look at me one last time. Pausing briefly, she smiled bravely before leaving and closing the door behind her.



By the time I entered the Great Hall, most of the dinner guests had already arrived and a cacophony of sounds filled the smoky air. The room had a high vaulted ceiling. I imagined when the castle was first built, the ceiling was open to the outside allowing smoke from the small central fireplace to escape from the roof. No doubt with later renovations, the ceiling had been closed off and the room

was now dominated by a huge stone fireplace carved into an iconic Tudor arch and set into the wall to my right side. As the evening was so balmy, no fire had been lit. However, the room was aglow with the flicker of tens of candles which cast gentle, dancing shadows around the chamber, bathing the castle's guests in a subdued yellow and orange light.

I had seen this room before, when I last visited the castle in my other lifetime. I admired its grand proportions yet it managed to maintain an intimate and cosy atmosphere. However, unlike the appearance of the much aggrandized 21st century room, a series of tapestries highlighted the white, lime-washed stone walls. One large tapestry was hung behind the dais at the high end of the chamber; whilst pressed against the walls were a number of large, dark, oak chests displaying the best of the family's silver plate. Whereas the tapestries I had seen in my modern life were faded and somewhat past their best, I found my breath taken away by those which were hung before me. Rich and

vivid colours of red, blue, violet and green were set against the shimmering of the silver thread work of this beautiful work of art.

When I visited the castle in the past – or was it the future? - I had always reflected wistfully how lonely this room appeared. I had imagined Sir Thomas, his wife, their children and perhaps some local gentry and neighbours talking and laughing about the latest gossip at court. But that night left nothing to the imagination. The room was full. A buzz of excited chatter filled the air, and was punctuated every now and again by an outburst of raucous laughter.

Laid in a horseshoe shape around the centre of the room – with the top table arranged along the length of the high end of the chamber – were long trestle tables dressed with fine white linen cloths. Over forty people filled the room, most of them already seated, whilst some guests stood around chatting nonchalantly with their friends. Weaving in

and out of the courtiers were a number of rather harassed looking servants, each bearing flagons of ale, wine goblets and plates which were presented to, and laid before, the diners. Rising above the hubbub, from within the very plain minstrel's gallery, I heard the most beautiful and melodic Tudor lute music, which floated down from above my head, as if it were coming from angels in heaven.

I immediately noticed the King, who was already seated at the head of the table and was deep in conversation with my father, Sir Thomas. Beyond Sir Thomas, on his right hand side, I saw my mother Elizabeth, who seemed engaged by a rather gruff looking elderly gentleman seated next to her. For an awful moment, I was unsure what I should do next. However, before I had any chance to think further on it, one of our servants came up to my side. Inclining his head in a polite bow, he opened his arms gesturing for me to follow him toward a vacant seat which, by then, I noticed was waiting for me at the left hand side of the King himself. As I made my way to it, I saw many heads turn in my

direction and I wondered what they were thinking. I was dressed in a truly sumptuous gown of the deepest scarlet satin, which enhanced the striking appearance of my dark hair and swarthy complexion. Embroidery of gold thread trimmed the square-cut neck line, whilst about my neck, and lying upon the gentle swell of my breasts, I wore a parure of pearls and rubies; a ruby encrusted, golden cross hanging down from the carcanet which encircled the base of my slender neck. I assumed that such a beautiful piece of jewellery had clearly been a gift from the King. To compliment it, matching billaments adorned my French hood, whilst a girdle ending in a gold pomander was clipped about my tiny waist. I wondered, were those that watched me simply appreciating the elegance of my attire, or, had I already seen jealousy alight in their eyes.

As I approached, Henry turned his attention towards me and I saw an enormous pride and desire in his eyes as he took in my beauty. His expression told me that he clearly appreciated the time and effort that I had put in to presenting

myself to him - and his courtiers.

"Anne! At last you have joined us; we have been missing your company entirely." He nodded his head respectfully and indicated for me to sit by his side. "Your father and I were just talking about your return to court; methinks it has been far too long, my love."

"Yes Your Grace. I understand how time drags by only too well when we are without something that is dear to us." I found myself speaking brazenly once more. "But, it is...difficult, Sire...."

"How so, my love?" Henry bit into some candied fruit he had plucked from a platter in front of us, as he listened intently.

"It is not easy... Katherine *knows* and she hates me for it." I spoke earnestly, "I have given my heart into Your Grace's hands and there is nothing more that I desire in this world

than to be by your side. But sometimes, I find her loathing too difficult to bear. I am just a woman with none of Your Grace's power or greatness." My modern sensibility felt that I was going a little over the top, but nevertheless the words poured forth with true sincerity. Anne was speaking through me once more, and with passion, about something she clearly had to endure. "It is sometimes easier for me to be here, where I do not have to bear her scorn and yet... I can always treasure Your Grace's memory close to my heart."

I watched Henry, searching his face for his reaction. To my surprise, I found that he seemed a little abashed. Perhaps he had not even realised how uncomfortable it must have been for Anne as it became increasingly evident to everyone - including the Queen - that Henry's ardour and passion was growing day by day, and that his 'infatuation' with Anne was perhaps, no mere passing affair.

"Sweetheart, I do not wish you to feel like this. We will see

what can be arranged." I wasn't quite sure what 'arranged' meant, but I knew that I would have to be content for the time being. Without saying anything else on the matter, Henry motioned to a steward who stood close by to come forward with the wine. This was duly poured into a silver goblet and handed to the King. Engaged in this activity, he did not notice my eyes fix my father's. Sir Thomas raised his eyebrows in an appreciative gesture of my forthright stance, raising his cup of wine to toast my good health as he did so.

The King was in merry spirits all evening; talking openly with both me and my father, and other senior courtiers. I was amazed at the never ending array of dishes being presented to us; mostly meats; a stuffed pig, pheasants and of course venison. Initially, as we began to eat, I was a little perplexed at the absence of any forks. However, I soon observed from those about me, that eating with one's fingers was *de rigueur*, using the knife only to cut away at the meat and silver spoons to take any liquid food.

Finally, with the feasting over, it was time to dance. Henry looked up, indicating to the leader of the consort in the minstrels' gallery that he should strike up a merry tune. With that, the King rose from his chair and offered me his hand. Soon many of the guests joined us in the space created in the middle of the room. I must admit, I was somewhat apprehensive, for I did not know any Tudor dances. I hoped and prayed that Anne would somehow, once again, guide me. Once more, she did not let me down. As the gentlemen and ladies of the court arranged themselves into lines facing each other, the consort struck up a jaunty melody and soon we were all dancing gaily. There was a great swishing of the ladies' full skirts, a blur of colour and a montage of smiling, happy faces as I was twirled around in the King's strong arms. As we moved from partner to partner, I smiled graciously at each gentleman that led me in the dance, not yet knowing their names or whether they be friend or foe. Finally, I found myself back with Henry and our eyes locked once more. I could not help but notice how

intently he followed each graceful move I made. Clearly, the King only had eyes for Anne; in that moment there was no evidence of the wanderlust for which he would become famous.

One dance melted into the next. I had always loved to dance; a slave to any beat that pulsed through my body; it always awakened in me a joyous and primitive urge to express the rhythm as graceful and sweeping movements. I could have danced with the King all night. However, after a while, he indicated that we should once more take our seats. As Henry and I made our way back to the great table, I was giddy with excitement, and my head was spinning from being twirled around and around to the beat of the drum. We had our arms about each other, laughing breathlessly from the sheer fun and exhilaration of the dance, when suddenly, I caught sight of my sister; she was standing over to my left hand side, close to the doorway through which I had entered. I squeezed Henry's hand, and

turning to him I said, "I have seen my sister, and I wish to speak to her, my love.

"Of course," Henry replied. He reached up and stroked the side of my cheek lovingly, and then we went our separate ways.

Left alone, I wound my way through the crowd, acknowledging the lords and ladies as I passed. In truth, I saw my sister talking to a handsome young man, and was somewhat curious to know his name. I wondered if he was one of Henry's intimates. Would I know all about him instantly, once I knew his identity? As I approached them, Mary noticed me and broke off her conversation with the gentleman in question.

"Sister, look who has arrived!" I was immediately curious. Clearly, I knew this gentleman well. "Master Wyatt is just returned from Rome." Ah! So, I now knew the gentleman was Thomas Wyatt, one of England's greatest poets. An early admirer of Anne's, he would be a staunch and loyal

supporter who would narrowly escape with his life during those terrible days of May, 1536. Thomas was tall, perhaps a little over six feet and of slender build; his limbs long and generously proportioned; his height and his unnerving good looks undoubtedly made him stand out amongst his contemporaries. He was elegantly, but not ostentatiously, dressed in a blue doublet and hose with a silver grey jerkin, whilst a black woollen gown, lined with fur, finished off the ensemble. What was most striking about him, however, was his rich, dark auburn hair set against piercing blue eyes; the colour of which matched perfectly the shade of his garments. As was the fashion, he had a beard which was quite short and cropped close to his jaw-line; as I drew closer, Thomas made a deep and elegant bow. With a flourish of his hand, he looked up at me, and I saw that he was grinning warmly. Clearly, his obsequious gesture had been meant as an intimate joke between friends.

"Mistress Anne! To see you again is as if to see the

sunshine emerge after the storm!"

"Master Thomas!" I played along lightly with his game.

"How delightful it is to see you back at Hever. I trust your trip went well?" Of course, I had no idea about the nature of his trip, but I was getting very good at saying the right things.

"Indeed it did, Madame." Looking pointedly over my shoulder towards the King, he went on; "I see, however, that you have been occupied somewhat during my absence." Perhaps I blushed slightly. I did not need to turn around to understand exactly what Thomas was talking about. In the slightly awkward pause that followed, my sister spoke up.

"Well, I think I'll leave you two to become reacquainted." She turned her back to Thomas, and as she walked by me, she caught my gaze and raised her eyebrows, smiling at me mischievously. It did not take a genius to begin to understand that there was something more between Thomas

and me than I might have hoped. Alone now, he turned towards me and said more seriously this time, "Did you miss me, Anne?"

I searched for the right thing to say. Already I was becoming aware of how delicate was my position. There were ears all around me even then, and I knew I had to be careful. Somewhat tentatively, I said,

"Thomas, I have missed you as I would miss any dear friend." At this, Thomas looked somewhat crestfallen. So he does love her, I thought to myself. What I did not know though was what exactly had passed between them. I was fairly sure however, that this romance had been entirely one-sided. When I first thought about being with Henry, I felt an overwhelming surge of both love and passion well up within me. I felt no such emotion toward Thomas, except the warmth and a familiarity that exists between old friends.

Thomas remained silent; his eyes downcast. He had clearly

been struggling with what to say to me next. Abruptly, I took him by the hand and led him to the quietest corner of the room. It was a vantage point overlooking the dance where I could speak to him more privately, whilst appearing to watch the guests make merry. As I spoke, I gave the impression of watching the dance intently and yet my words were clearly addressed to Thomas, who was standing close by my side.

"Listen to me, Thomas," I said in a hushed whisper. "Whatever has passed between us is in the past, you must understand that!" I glanced at him sideways and saw that he was studying intently. "Things have changed..."

When Thomas finally spoke, there was great sadness in his voice. "So, I see it is true, the King has indeed been out hunting." I could see out of the corner of my eye that he was looking at the King. Henry must have felt our gaze upon him, for he looked up. I smiled warmly hoping

that he could not see the turmoil that I felt inside. Thomas went on. "Do you not see it Anne? He has blinded you with his wealth and his power." He paused before adding, "I can see though that it must be intoxicating for a woman like you, to have a man like Henry at your feet." I shot him a glance expecting to see anger in his eyes. However, there was only tenderness there, which took me by surprise.

"Don't you see?" I kept looking ahead of me, feigning interest in the activities unfolding on the dance floor. "Don't you see how hard it is for a woman in this world? I am but the property of my father! And yet Henry... Henry gives me the chance of freedom!"

"Freedom! You jest with me, Anne. Henry will buy your love - but it will be at a high price. I love you, Anne! I love you for who you are!" I felt my heart thundering in my chest. I felt confused at Thomas's declaration of love, and at the same time terrified that we would be overheard. He

forged on, "I would love you unconditionally, Anne. The King will love you only on one condition, and that condition will be the fruit of your womb!" With that, Thomas clearly could not take anymore. He dipped me a curt bow before turning on his heels and walking quickly from the room.

I was left standing there, feeling as if one thousand eyes were upon me, and that everyone had heard our conversation. I hardly dared look up at Henry. What if he had seen the intensity of our conversation and guessed that something was passing between Thomas and me?

However, when I finally did so, all continued as it had before, with Henry laughing raucously throwing his head back in unbridled mirth.



Sometime after midnight, the revels finally came to an end; the guests gradually melting away into the night. The

King and his closest attendants were lodged within the castle. However, as the castle was a modest size, the majority of the King's entourage were housed in spacious and brightly coloured tents laid out close to the village, just to the west of the castle or in nearby Polebrook Manor. I returned to my bedchamber. Four or five candles lit the room, providing a subdued glow, which was much to my taste after the riotous sights and sounds of the evening. I noticed that one of the maids had prepared my bed which was turned down and ready for me to sink into gratefully. Bess briefly reappeared to help me undress and return my jewels to their casket. Then, having helped me in to my linen nightgown, which reached down to my ankles, she brushed my hair and braided it, before bobbing a short curtsy and turning to leave the room, closing the door quietly behind her.

I eased myself between the cool linen sheets, longing for sleep to come. I was physically, utterly exhausted. Every

time I closed my eyes I expected to find myself back in my flat in London when I opened them again – to find out that this indeed had all been an amazing dream. Yet it did not happen and sleep would not come to me. My mind was abuzz with excitement, exhilaration and wonderment. As I lay there in the darkened room, I noticed how the castle descended into silence. Only the occasional shout could be heard drifting up from the revellers outside as they had made their drunken way back to their lodgings; I thought how some things never change. I was surprised to find that despite my unbelievable and bizarre circumstances, I no longer felt afraid. I would never be able to explain what had, and what was, happening to me, but I always knew that Anne was never far from my side.

Eventually, after an hour or so, I gave up trying to fall asleep. Throwing the covers back, I slipped out of the bed and put on a silk dressing gown, lined with velvet, which had been laid across a stool in case I should need it. I knew

where I wanted to go. Earlier in the evening, I overheard my father discussing astronomy with the King. I heard him recount how, during our childhood, he would take us up to the roof of the Gatehouse so that we could gaze at the stars. Henry, I also remembered, was a keen astronomer. He had talked with my father about the possibility of his paying a visit to the rooftop himself on such a fine night. He asked my father how he should reach it. I listened intently to his directions, and I knew where I was heading. I needed some fresh air. Picking up the solitary candle which had lit my room, I tiptoed towards the door and slipped into the corridor beyond. Thankfully, the spiral staircase leading up to the roof was close to my bedroom, and it was not long before I found myself stepping gingerly up the cold stone staircase and out into the warm night.

As I looked up, the sky seemed to be alight with one thousand stars, resplendent against the blackness that stretched across the heavens. In my other lifetime, I was so

used to the orange- yellow glow of artificial light, that the sheer brilliance of the myriad of luminescent stars that formed a canopy over my head, took my breath away. Without a sound, I made my way across the roof of the castle to the parapet. The stone was cold and rough beneath my fingers, and as I peered over it, I saw the moat below aglow from the silvery-blue light reflected from the full moon above. I peered out into the inky blackness towards the woodland beyond. Ghostly echoes of the night owl emanated from the darkness, as she went about her own hunting foray. The night was warm, and even though I had worn only a nightshirt and the softest silk dressing gown, I felt no chill. Resting my hands wide apart against the ledge, I lifted my face towards the sky and breathed in deeply the spaciousness of the still night.

For the first time in this strange and bizarre world, I found my mind was quiet and I began to merge into the silence that surrounded me. For a moment, I lost all sense of myself,

where I was and what was happening to me. So, when his voice cut through my meditation, I found myself jolted back to reality. However, despite being startled, I did not move, except to slowly turn my head, half looking over my right shoulder; it was the voice of the King. Yet again, I was struck by Anne's composure, her ability to remain cool and aloof when others would fall over themselves in their obsequiousness towards their lord and master. I remained silent and waited for Henry to speak again, almost as if to explain himself, and his interruption of my privacy.

"I hoped I might find you here," he said. For a moment, I detected an unusual hesitancy in his voice. It seemed that he too understood that I might wish to be alone. He continued, "You looked radiant tonight, sweetheart. I could not settle. I am... I kept seeing your face and I wanted so very much to feel the softness of your skin and the warmth of your sweet kisses."

Without uttering a word, I looked away, staring back out into

the night, only to hear the rustle of his garments as he came in closer toward me. Without speaking another word, I felt Henry's strong hand reach around the side of my neck and caress it gently. At the same time, I felt his body press against my back as his other hand reached around the front of me, taking hold of the soft curves of my belly. As we merged into one, becoming inseparable, I felt the warmth of his breath, as he nuzzled his face tenderly into my hair, kissing my long and elegant neck. Despite myself, I felt every muscle of my body yield and melt under his. I softened into his embrace, extending my neck and allowing him to kiss me. Quite soon, his right-hand found its way beneath my silk dressing gown and nightshirt. I think I must have let out the softest of groans, subsumed in waves of pleasure, as he slipped his hand inside my clothes, stroking and caressing my breast.

I felt Henry's erection pressing hard against the small of my back. I wondered for a moment if he himself was so

consumed with passion that he might take me there and then, but he seemed to be content to hold me there in a silent embrace. I was surprised by the tenderness in his insistent passion, and found myself glad that he had me scooped up within his arms, for I feared that I may just melt away in ecstasy. Although, I nearly lost myself in this desire, a small voice kept warning me of the dangers that I faced ahead. Before I could stop myself, I spoke out loud. I did not face Henry, for I feared I could not look him in the eyes and say what I need to say. Instead, I spoke out into the night, in hushed whispers, knowing full well that he would hear all.

"Henry... Henry I am deeply humbled that you should think to raise me so high in the estate of your sovereign lady wife, to be the Queen of England, but what..." I found it difficult to voice what I needed to say to him. "But what if we cannot have sons; what if I can't give you a son! "Henry continued to caress my body covering me with delicate

kisses. His lips alighted on my ear and he whispered into it almost imperceptibly, so that only I could hear.

"My love, you are the world to me. You have lit a fire in my heart that can never be extinguished. Our love is pure and goodly in the sight of God, of that I am sure. We will be blessed with many children and with sons. Has your mother not born male children? No Anne, there is nothing for us to fear. England will have to melt into the ocean before I stop loving you."

Oh, I so wanted to believe those words! That this man was in love with me, whether he be the King of England or no; that he would never desert me; that he would always be there to protect me from the wolves at court. I yielded yet again to his embrace and his kisses, allowing them to chase my fearful thoughts into the black recesses of my mind. There we must have stayed, perhaps for an hour or more. It would be a rare moment of aloneness, with no prying, or accusing,

eyes. We rested peacefully in each other's arms enfolded
by our shared dream.

Chapter Four

Hever Castle,

June 1, 1527

I was awoken the next morning with another flurry of excitement. The King was already breaking his fast with my parents and asked that I should join them. After breakfast, Henry took me aside and told me that he was to return to court, to London, that very morning. There was urgency in his voice. He wished to consult again with his councillors and enquire if they had made any progress in their investigation of the matter of the annulment of his marriage to Katherine. He took both my small hands within his and holding them tight, searched my face earnestly, begging me not to tarry long at Hever, but shortly to join him in London.

I must admit that I found myself to be afraid. The peaceful tranquillity of Hever suddenly seemed to be my

refuge in a precarious and unforgiving world. I think that I must have nodded meekly, and given the King enough assurance of my intentions to return, for he smiled at me and kissed my forehead, before he let go of my hands, and swept off to make preparations for the journey ahead.

It was with the same riot of colour and commotion that the King's party finally departed a little after nine o'clock in the morning. Along with my mother, father and my sister, Mary, we wished the King God's speed and good health; waiting there in the little courtyard at Hever until the clouds of dust from the horses' hooves finally settled and all sounds had melted away in the morning sunshine. As we all turned to go back inside the castle, I found myself gently taking hold of my father's arm as he walked at my side. Suddenly, I was gripped by a desire to send after the King a token of my love and commitment. I was sure that I needed my father's help. He turned to look at me, his face inquisitive as he waited for me to speak

"Father, in the light of the great honour that the King has shown toward your daughter, I feel that," I searched for the right words, "I should send the King a gift, some token of my love for him."

"Anne, your judgement in this matter has been impeccable." I winced imperceptibly. I saw clearly that for Anne this was, by now at least, also an affair of the heart. Yet for her father it had become an affair of state. "I will arrange for our jeweller to visit us this afternoon, so that you may choose an appropriate token of your... love". He patted my hand, then turned and left me alone with my thoughts.

Shortly after, my mother and sister left the castle; riding out to visit one of our close neighbours. My father disappeared into the Great Hall, I assumed to deal with the pile of parchment carried in behind him by one of our servants. I found myself relieved to be left alone at least for some short time. With the departure of the King's entourage, the castle lay quietly in a peaceful repose.

In only the short time that I had been there, I had learned much about this beautiful building. Yet there was still much to be discovered, and I found myself wandering through corridors and rooms, filled with the same wonderment and curiosity as that of a child exploring its environment for the very first time. I was not content merely to drink in the treasures that surrounded me with my eyes; I ran the tips of my fingers across the smooth and highly polished oak furniture, touching woollen and silk tapestries, lingering over the rough gilt framed portraits and tracing the curves of the carved stone fireplaces. However, of all the places in the castle that I desired to be, I was drawn back to the place where I had entered into this new life; the Long Gallery. When Mary had woken me from my unconscious state, only the day before, I was disoriented and hardly able to take in the beauty of this elegant space, before I was wrenched away to meet the King. Built to allow the family to take exercise in inclement weather, this warm, sunny June day meant that the Gallery was deserted, with the exception of a

solitary maid who was busy polishing the oak floor at the far end of the Gallery. I was quiet as a mouse as I entered the room, yet the rustling of my taffeta skirts caught her attention, for she looked up and rising immediately, she bobbed a curtsey then left the room.

Once alone, I walked straight over to the window set back into one of the recesses off the main Gallery; it was the same one that I took refuge in just the previous day. As before, a window was propped open, although I could not detect any breeze, so still was the air. I sat down on the window seat, the stone ledge strewn with red velvet cushions. Leaning back against the glass, I closed my eyes. I could not help but feel guilty. I knew that I should want to get back to my real life, to my work, to my friends - and to Daniel. Yet all my life, I had craved and wistfully longed for an impossible moment like this; a moment in which I might be able to see the face of a woman whom I had admired for so long. Beyond all probability and my wildest

imagination, I was experiencing with my flesh and blood the very life of Anne Boleyn. I had met the King of England, been so close to him that I could smell the musky warmth of his skin as he held me in his arms. He had asked me to marry him and to be the Queen of England, and I had experienced the thrill of it. Of course, there was fear. Yet, part of me longed to stay; Anne's life was intoxicating and I was already becoming addicted, feverishly craving to know more, to allow her to consume me and to lose myself in her being. I stayed there for some time, my thoughts lingering on the seemingly dusty memories of my modern day life. When I opened my eyes again, all remained unchanged about me. I looked down at my hands folded in my lap. After the extravagance of the previous evening, I chose a plain, yet flattering gown of black taffeta. I wore virtually no jewels except a small gold ring, which I toyed with absent-mindedly, and a string of pearls about my neck from which hung a gold crucifix. When I looked up, Bess was standing in the doorway.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mistress Anne. Sir Thomas asked me to come and find you. The jeweller from Maidstone has arrived as you requested."

"Thank you," I replied. The maid turned and disappeared from view, leaving me to make my way downstairs. Finally, at the foot of the grand staircase, I stood opposite the castle's main entrance. The 21st century Entrance Hall - where I had first taken ill on the previous day - did not exist. In its place were the original kitchen, larder and buttery. I noticed that the portraits of Anne Boleyn and her sister, Mary, were nowhere to be seen. I surmised that at this time, paintings similar to the ones I saw in the present day, had not yet been commissioned by the family. The Boleyns had yet to reach the pinnacle of their power and fame.

From my right, voices were coming from within the Great Hall. I heard my father, Sir Thomas, talking with an unknown man. When I entered the room, I saw them both

standing on the dais, next to the top table; as I entered they looked up at me. The jeweller made a respectful bow in my direction, and my father gestured for me to come in and to join them.

"Anne, Master Silas has brought a selection of his finest jewellery for us to look at today." As he spoke, he gestured with his hand to a series of fine jewels laid out on a soft, velvet, black cloth on the table which, as I approached, were now in front of me.

"I hope you will find something here of your liking, Madame" Master Silas said in a soft and gentle voice.

However, his words were lost on me, as one particular jewel immediately drew my attention. Perhaps I gasped, although it must have been almost imperceptible, as neither my father nor the jeweller appeared to notice my astonishment. For there on the table, calling to me, was a jewel which I recognised. Hesitantly, almost as if it might burn me, I reached out and picked it up, bringing it closer to my face so

that I may take in its intricate detail. I found myself holding a small gold ship containing within it a solitary damsel. The gold work around the ship suggested that it was being tossed in the stormy sea; hanging down from the underside of the ship was a flawless diamond.

I remembered reading about this jewel from a letter written to Anne in Henry's own handwriting; one of those letters which has survived in the Vatican archives. The letter thanked Anne for this very gift. I also recalled the symbolism contained in such a piece; the type of encoded message much beloved by people who lived in this age. The ship was a sign of protection, guarding the solitary maid within from the stormy seas that surrounded her; the diamond a symbol of endurance and everlasting love. This jewel would not only be a token of Anne's love, but would symbolise to Henry her surrender into his hands; the commitment of her body and soul to him.

Without looking at either my father or Master Silas, I said in

the quietest voice, "This is the one, father." With that, I placed the jewel back on the table, curtsied respectfully to the two men, and turned to leave the room. After a few steps, I paused briefly, turning to look back at my father. The two men looked nonplussed. They were clearly bewildered that I chose so quickly and with apparently such cursory attention to the other precious gifts laid before me.

"I will write the King a letter to accompany this token of my esteem and affection." I hesitated for a moment, as if trying to find the words to explain how this gift would not only touch Henry's heart but would become indelibly marked in the annals of history; an echo of this moment in time. Of course, it was impossible to explain this to these people who knew nothing of the future. So with some resignation, I smiled, turned, and left the room.



Later that afternoon, I sat alone in the library to write the

letter. It was always a warm and welcoming room and if I could be anywhere now, I would choose to hide there, amongst familiar friends. Since I was a child, I adored books and learning. I find libraries to be profoundly restful places; the reassuring voices of our ancestors, speaking from the pages of the books which surrounded me, always seemed to envelop me, and hold me as if I was a foetus suspended in a silent and protective womb.

Before sitting down to compose the words that I wished to write to the King, I took my time to peruse the shelves; the heavy and musky scent from the many leather bound volumes filled my nostrils. Most of the volumes spoke of history, geography, and of course politics and religion. Every now and then, I paused and gently, with my thumb and forefinger, extracted a volume, flicking through the thick parchment, and sometimes vellum, that lay within. Of

course, this was the early 16th century and I remembered

the printing press had not long been invented. This explained why many of the volumes appeared to be handwritten and some of the religious texts exquisitely adorned, with hand drawn illustrations etched in vivid and beautiful colours. It occurred to me that many of these books must stretch back into the 12th and 13th century when the castle was originally built. I suspected that much of the information stored there would be subsequently lost in the sands of time. I vowed to spend as much time as I could in my father's library, before my fate would draw me away from Hever and onwards towards London.

Two large windows allowed the light to stream into the room and illuminate the large, oak desk that was placed at its centre and at which I seated myself. I looked down at the blank piece of parchment that lay before me and carefully, I took the quill in my hand. Poised above the parchment, I paused; this was to be the first letter that I would write to Henry, the letter in which I would avow to

him my maidenhead and my life; yet how to write to a King? For a moment, my mind was blank and then as if I were taking dictation from Anne herself, I began to write easily, and in fluent French, the words pouring forth from my quill:

Sire,

It belongs only to the august mind of a great King, to whom Nature has given a heart full of generosity towards the sex, to honour with such extraordinary devotion and commitment a simple maid such as myself. In truth, your Majesty, I do not know what I have done to deserve the inexhaustible treasury of your Majesty's bounty. I am clear amazed that you should offer your heart and body and soul to a girl such as Anne Boleyn. Yet I give thanks to God for howsoever great may be the bounties I have received, and the great honour that you seek now to bestow upon me, it cannot compare with the joy that I feel in being loved by a King whom I adore, and to whom I now pledge to sacrifice my own heart.

As an assurance of my obedience to you in all matters and as a small token of the constancy of my

love for your Majesty, I have sent to you a gift which I know will touch your Majesty's heart in its understanding.

Assuring you by my own lips (which I shall do yet again on the first opportunity) that I am, Your Majesty's very obliged and very obedient servant, without any reserve, Anne Boleyn.

I put down the quill and stared at the letter, reading it over and over. These words had surged through me, and yet, I struggled to comprehend what I was experiencing. However, the deed was done. Leaving the library, I gave the letter to my father's personal secretary who sealed it and assured me of its delivery. As I made my way back to my bedroom, I was aware that I had just put quill to parchment and written indelibly on the pages of history.

Chapter Five

Allington Castle,

June 2, 1527

It was at breakfast the following morning that my father announced that he was due to return to London that very day. There was much that needed to be done on the Privy Council, and he wished to oversee the furthering of our family interests. Clearly, always a man with his eye on opportunity, he sent a messenger to the Duke of Norfolk, my mother's brother, indicating that events were moving apace but that he dare not commit these to any letter. He requested that they meet without delay, and sought to do so at the earliest opportunity. Perhaps I looked anxious, for my mother reached over and gently laid her hand on mine. I was learning quickly that Elizabeth Boleyn was a profoundly

reassuring presence in Anne's life; when she was around me, her warm and generous smile and sparkling eyes allowed me to breathe more easily.

"Anne, your sister and I are travelling out yet again today. We have a need to visit Sir Henry and Lady Wyatt at Allington Castle. You have been cooped up here for days child, and methinks it will do you good to get out and see some of our dear friends."

I remembered immediately that Allington Castle was the home of the Wyatt family and was situated about ten miles from Hever Castle. I suspected that my mother was unaware of Anne's relationship with Thomas Wyatt, for she would hardly be likely to expose her daughter to any further rumours and gossip, given the King's now undoubted and serious interest in her. I also knew that Thomas had been married but that the union was not a happy one. I remembered that at some point, he and his wife had separated on the grounds of adultery. However, I could

not remember when, and I could not help but wonder whether this had anything to do with Anne. Yet on that day, I was curious and as I looked into my mother's face, I felt that she desired the company of her youngest daughter, almost as much as I desired her reassuring presence.

"Of course, I would like that very much, mother." I smiled and gently squeezed her hand.

A little more than an hour later, accompanied by four of our liveried servants, I found myself watching Hever Castle disappear into the distance as we rumbled and jolted our way along the track in a horse-drawn litter. As the miles stretched ahead of us, we settled in, making our way slowly and deliberately through the country lanes. All around us, the bushes and trees were bedecked with spring blossom and I realised that I'd never felt more alive. I leaned against the side of the litter, my cheek propped against my hand, as I drank in every detail of the lanes, dwellings, fields and

people as they slipped by. Gazing out, I was vaguely aware of the chatter between my mother and sister. Much of this I allowed to drift past my conscious attention. However, occasionally titbits of gossip aroused my interest.

There was much talk of my brother, George - who was preoccupied with family business - and who remained at court during the King's visit. I was well aware that perhaps of everyone within the Boleyn family, it was George who shared the closest relationship with Anne; it was one that, in time, I would come to understand and cherish. Many times over the previous few days, I wondered as to the whereabouts of my brother, but of course, I dared not ask. I had to admit, with George's charismatic and colourful reputation as a witty raconteur, I was eager to meet him; although I wondered somewhat nervously whether he may be the one to notice an unusual change in his sister. I dismissed the thought instantly. Why should he suspect anything? It was hardly credible even to me, a woman from

the future, as to what was happening to me; of what was happening to Anne.

As my mother spoke of him, it became clear that she despaired of his difficult relationship with his wife, Jane Boleyn; soon to be Lady Rochford. For I knew that with the King's pledge of marriage, further rewards and recognition would soon be bestowed upon the Boleyn family. It was clear from the chatter, that George's eye was too easily distracted from his marriage bed; yet I also sensed that while Mary's reputation suffered for her indiscretions, George's, rather unfairly, remained intact.

The journey was painfully slow. By the time we arrived at Allington Castle, I was sore and bruised and even a little nauseous from the constant rocking and jolting against the potholed, baked-earth of the narrow and winding country lanes. I leaned forward, my hands grasping the edge of the litter. The imposing grandeur of this fortified country house was magnificent indeed. I reckoned that Allington Castle

was at least three to four times the size of our little home at Hever. Made of grey stone, this mediaeval building was rectangular in shape; comprising a defensive curtain wall connected at each corner with a series of semi-circular towers; each one facing the moat that surrounded the entire structure.

We rattled over the ancient drawbridge and passed under the imposing Barbican and Gatehouse. Glancing upwards, I saw the portcullis tucked away above me and wondered if it had ever been used in defence. Perhaps it had, but on that pleasant summer's day, all was well. The clattering of hooves on the cobblestones was deafening as the sound reverberated around the small enclosed space beneath the arch of the Gatehouse. Finally, our litter emerged once again into the open sunlight of the large inner courtyard, as we drew up opposite the main entrance.

A servant dressed in blue and red livery immediately stepped forward and opened the door, offering his hand to

my mother, sister and me. Once within the cool shadows of the large and grand Entrance Hall, we were met by an elderly looking gentleman who was rather stout and portly. He wore a long black overcoat, trimmed with a chocolate brown fur mantle. Draped about his shoulders was a thick and heavy gold collar. The sleeves of the garment were trimmed with black damask and the cuffs lined with gold thread work. Upon his head, he sported a black velvet cap, or coif, as I would come to know it; this cap closely fitted the shape of his skull and came down about his ears. Poking out from beneath it, I could just see the odd strand of grey hair which betrayed his advancing years. I found his face beguiling and imagined that his countenance could well be stern and severe should the need arise. Yet on this occasion, his face, which was deeply etched with the years of his experience, was set alight in a warm and generous smile.

As he moved towards us, his girth and the bulk of his clothes

gave the impression that he was waddling rather than walking. His outstretched arms welcomed us, and I could not help but notice his large, bear-like hands that seemed to scoop us up into his abode. I surmised that this must be the master of the house, Sir Henry Wyatt. Unfortunately, I knew little about him. I assumed that the display of wealth all around indicated that this man had led a successful life at court and was probably held in high esteem by the King. I found myself taking an immediate liking to him.

"My Lady Elizabeth!" The man's voice was deep and resonant. "It is marvellous to see you and your beautiful daughters yet again." With that he looked first toward Mary and then me, nodding an appreciative bow in our direction. If he knew of Mary's reputation, he was discreet enough not to show it. However, I did not fail to notice that he lingered perhaps a little longer than he ought when he looked upon my face. I wondered if he knew of what had passed between Anne and his son, or perhaps he

was already aware of the King's intentions and was trying to fathom how a simple country girl like me could have captivated a Prince as magnificent as Henry. "We have much to speak about." With that he stepped aside, opening out his arm and indicating that we should follow him into the castle. As we walked together he continued, "my wife is just concluding some household business and will join us presently." Then, he looked at Mary and me, and added, "and my son Thomas and some of his friends are already out in the garden enjoying this beautiful day. Perhaps you should like to join them?"

Before we could answer, my mother replied, "of course, that is exactly what the two of you should do. There is no point in you being bored by the ramblings of old people reminiscing about the past. Go and enjoy yourselves and when our business is concluded, I shall send for you. Well children, tarry not!" With a broad smile she shooed us away. Happily, Mary knew exactly where to go and grabbed me by the hand, as we made our way lightly through corridors and

rooms. Eventually we came to a stone corridor which led across the moat at the back of the castle and into the gardens beyond.

Immediately, I heard the sounds of laughter and voices coming from some distance over to our right, deep within the formal gardens. Letting go of my hand, Mary went ahead of me, turning to call over her shoulder. Despite being the eldest of the Boleyn children, I noticed that she often seemed the most childlike; full of innocence and wonderment.

"Come on! I'll race you!" Picking up her skirts like a tomboy, she made haste down some stone steps and through a high, dense hedge which surrounded the garden. I paused for a moment, laughing to myself; my sister's *joie de vivre* was always infectious. Once again, I found myself puzzled over how she was to become the outcast of the family, when it seemed to me she had such a generous and loving heart. I suspected it was that very same childish

impetuosity and generous heart which would cause her to be led by her emotions in her dealings with men. I did not see my father, Sir Thomas, as an emotional man, nor forgiving of those who overindulged in theirs. My mother, although kind, seemed deeply conservative and pious and likely intolerant of anything which might heap shame upon the family; and Anne was ultimately too shrewd to allow her heart to rule her head. It seemed that in various ways, all of this would set Mary on a collision course with her family in the years to come.

Rather than chasing after her, as was Anne's way I suspected, I took stock of all that surrounded me. In front of me, the paths diverged in two directions. I could take the right and go after my sister, or go straight on, towards a garden which was surrounded by a high, red- bricked wall. From where I stood, this path wound down to an intricate wrought iron gate set into the wall, leading into an informal garden beyond. Anne would always be a woman of her own

mind and through pure stubbornness, I chose this second path.

It was not long before I found myself pushing open the creaking metal gate and stepping into an orchard which had been allowed to grow wild. It was now bursting with a riot of summer flowers and the last of the May blossom. I immediately fell in love with the untamed beauty of the place. I ambled my way through the longish grass, reaching out with my hand to touch the flowers as I passed by. A marvelous array of butterflies, some which I had never seen before, danced from bloom to bloom. All around me, the languid buzzing of bees going about their work set the monotonous beat against which the harmony of birdsong filled the air.

I walked towards a particularly large apple tree and as I approached it, half hidden by the grass, I suddenly came upon Master Wyatt. He was stretched out, legs crossed in front of him, leaning back against the trunk of the tree with

the sun upon his face. In his hands was a piece of parchment and a quill and I noticed that the page was almost full with his elegant and sweeping hand-writing. He had not seen or heard me approach, for his eyes were closed. I suspected that he was lost in a reverie, drinking in his inspiration from the bounty of nature which surrounded us. Suddenly, I was seized by a great desire for mischief. I darted forward and grabbed the parchment from Thomas's hands. He jumped, clearly startled by my sudden presence, and although he reached forward to grab the paper back from me, before he could do so, I twirled around, taking it out of his reach.

"Anne, give it back to me!" He pleaded but I was oblivious to his protestations. Holding it high, I began to read it aloud.

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind,

But as for me hélas, I may no more.

*The vain travail hath wearied me so sore, I am of them that
farthest cometh behind. Yet may I by no means my wearied
mind Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore Fainting I*

*follow. I leave off therefore, Sithens in a net I seek to hold the
wind. Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,
As well as I may spend his time in vain. And graven with
diamonds in letters plain There is written, her fair neck
round about: Noli me tangere, for Caesar's I am,
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.*

Of course, I recognised the prose immediately, because historians believe it to be one of Thomas's most well-known verses about Anne. My words, which had started with such jubilation and passion, trailed away as I reached the end; suddenly, I felt incredibly saddened by the enormous sense of loss and grief which poured forth from the poem. I paused in silence, my hand and the parchment within it, falling to my side. I looked at Thomas still resting back against the tree, one of his knees bent up and his hand resting lightly on it. He was watching me and his face betrayed a mixture of both pain and resignation, as if I had invaded this most private of agonies. For a few moments, we stayed there in silence, so much unspoken passing between us. Eventually I broke the silence.

"Oh Thomas! What have I done to you?" As I spoke, I moved towards him, plopping myself down in the long grass by his side. I too lent back against the tree trunk, both of us now looking out into the garden, preoccupied for a moment with our own thoughts. It was Thomas who was next to speak, and I listened with rapt attention as he began to talk about Anne and their early relationship.

"When you were just a young girl, maybe ten or eleven, you reminded me of one of those young fawns that we would find from time to time hidden in the long grass in the forest; the ones left by their mothers as they went out for the day to forage for food. You were all arms and legs and if the truth be known, a little clumsy. Of course, you already had those beautiful, beguiling, black eyes that you have learned to use to enchant anybody who meets you." He laughed lightly, and continued, "do you remember, Anne? you used to fancy me then, you even asked me to marry you in the gardens at Hever. Of course, I knew it was just childish

infatuation, there was already evidence of the essence of the woman you were to become - yet my lusty youth had me chasing other quarry. Oh, how I missed my chance and how I so dearly regret it!" He sighed, lost in his memories, and continued, "then, all too suddenly, you were sent as a maid of honour to Margaret of Austria, before your father secured your position in France with the King's sister, Mary, and then Queen Claude. When you finally returned some eight years later and I saw you again, you were transformed from that ungainly fawn into a magnificent and wild creature of incredible grace, strength and exotic allure. I was besotted with you, utterly and completely and yet," he paused wistfully for a moment before continuing, "when I looked into your eyes I knew that you were lost to me. You had drunk from the cup of kings and tasted the attentions of mighty princes. It was clear to me immediately that you had set your sights high, and that Anne Boleyn would never be the wife of a simple country gentleman like me." He cocked his head

thoughtfully, "you know Anne, you are a unique and remarkable woman; intemperate and headstrong at times, yes, but courageous, strong, intelligent, glamorous and oh, not to mention probably... no I should say definitely, the most alluring woman in Christendom!"

He threw his head in laughter, while I remained silent, watching him intently, yet I dared not interrupt him, for I wanted to know more. "Most men are frightened of you, did you know that Anne?" He turned to look at me earnestly. "And those who aren't, want to possess you, for you are like a priceless, flawless diamond; radiant and utterly beguiling. Henry is such a man. I see it in his eyes. He has to have you. You will set our country in a roar, my lady! For to try and hold you is to try and keep a wave upon the shore. I shudder to think what he will do, who he will crush and what he will tear down to have you as his own. For I know you Anne, you will not give yourself away to him as your sister did. You are too shrewd for that and have

learned her lesson well." He then shifted his position, turning to face me. Looking over my shoulder, our faces were close, as if we might kiss, yet of course we did not. He searched my face, as if to implore me one last time to step away from the abyss.

Finally, he spoke again, "I have loved you with all my heart for of all of seven years now. It is because of you that my wife hated me so much. Oh, she did not know about you specifically, but she sensed that my heart lay with another and that our bed was cold. I could not bring myself to touch her, for when I tried, all I saw was your face, your smile and your eyes. Yet I now see," he nodded and indicated towards the poem that I still had in my hand, "that the chase is over and that I will never have the chance to share my life with you. I do not know what lies ahead. I suspect that you shall have your way and perhaps even one day be the Queen of England, but I will always love you and will always serve you, on my life and my honour, I pledge it."

I allowed the sincerity and intimacy of Thomas' words to fill my heart, before I reached across and gently stroked his cheek saying, "I know Thomas. I know it well and thank you." I withdrew my hand, and paused briefly, looking down to the ground before raising my eyes once more. "And I am truly sorry for the pain that I have caused you." Then, from all that I knew that lay ahead, I said, "I have a destiny and I see that my life unfolds before me, sometimes even in spite of myself. I will need your support Thomas, for perhaps things will not always be so easy." I paused for a moment before adding a little more than perhaps I intended to say. "And above all you must be careful, for you and I will pass through the lion's den." Then, for one final moment, we held each other, the last vestige of our childhood friendship finally departing. In our silence, I think we both knew, in our own ways, that everything was about to change, and that the carefree summers that we had spent in the Kentish countryside were coming quickly to an end.



In due course, we joined the rest of the group. Along with Mary and me, there was Thomas' sister, Margery (whom I did not know at the time would become like a sister to me and one of my closest confidantes), her sister Anne, her husband John Rogers, Lady Bridget Harvey, and four more of Thomas' close friends who had stopped by at Allington to visit the Wyatts. The party spread themselves out under the shade of the generous old oak tree that dominated this part of the garden. Numerous rugs were laid about the lawn; strewn with a variety of large and soft cushions in various shades and rich fabrics, upon which these gentlemen and ladies now reclined in the afternoon sunshine. A hearty picnic was well underway and I found myself glad for it, for the long journey had made me ravenous. I suspected that the wine being passed around had been flowing for some time, as there was much jollity and

laughter from this merry little band.

As we joined the group, Thomas introduced me to a couple of his friends, whom I had not met before, and would see little of again. However, also present was a lady that I would come to know well; her name was Lady Bridget Harvey, *nee* Wiltshire. It was clear from the warmth of her greeting that she knew Anne well. Indeed, it would not take me long to establish that Lady Bridget was from another Kentish family and as such, was long-standing friend of both the Boleyns and the Wyatts. I dipped a curtsy respectfully to all present, and could not help but notice how for some, their attentions lingered upon me perhaps just a little longer than was socially acceptable. With the exception of my sister, Thomas and Margery, it was evident that the other members of the group treated me with a little more deference than anyone else present. I could not help but wonder whether my sister had already shared something of the King's intentions toward me. I dismissed the possibility

immediately; Mary may be many things, I mused, but I believed that above all, she was loyal and discreet and I trusted her implicitly. More likely, with the King's burgeoning interest in Anne becoming more evident at court, rumours had already begun to circulate of their romantic involvement.

In 1527, with so much not yet known, I suspected that I was a source of enormous curiosity. However, taking Thomas' lead, they soon accepted my presence and everybody began to relax into the feasting, gossiping and merry-making. When we had eaten our fill, and I felt I would burst, one of Thomas' brother-in-law picked up his lute which he had propped against the tree behind him. Mary suddenly jumped to her feet and clapping her hands in front of her cried, "I wish to dance! John, play us a lively tune so that we may do so gaily!" Without hesitation, one of the other young gentlemen sprang gallantly to his feet and taking her small hand, he led her out onto to the expanse of

lawn in front of us. In those days, we were still young and carefree and none of us needed much persuading to follow them. Before long, accompanied by sweet music, we began to dance and twirl as I had done at Hever only a couple of days before. I later learned that we were dancing a Volta that day, as we were lifted high into the air in the strong arms of the men who commanded us. The ladies, including myself, found ourselves throwing our heads back and laughing heartily in the sheer joy of the moment.

Finally, when we tired of the dance, our sides aching from laughing, our heads spinning from the relentless whirling around, one of our group suggested that we play blind man's bluff. We were strong and our energy seemed infinite; so despite our exhaustion, we began to play. Glowing with the heat of our merry-making, the men had now had lost their outer gowns and jerkins, tossed carelessly onto the grass, and now wearing only their shoes, tights and finely embroidered, loose fitting shirts, they were each in turn

blindfolded with a white, silk scarf. Arms outstretched, they groped in the dark, as we ladies ducked and dived to avoid capture; the men who were not been taking part, stood aside shouting encouragement and jeering alternately at "the blind man". When each had taken his turn, Thomas piped up, "Methinks it is now Mistress Anne's turn." He smiled at me wryly, arms folded across his chest, challenging me to step forward. As well Thomas knew, I was never one to shy away from a challenge, so I strode forward purposefully and took the white silk handkerchief from my sister who tied it about my eyes. I was plunged into darkness, relying only upon the rustling of skirts, the scuffing of shoes and the many shouts and shrieks about me to guide me to my prey. Eventually, almost exhausted from the exertion and the laughter, I caught hold of somebody's shirt. I recognised my captive as a man, for his muscular chest was hard against my hand and at such close quarters, I could smell the scent of his maleness. I reached up and lifted the blindfold from my eyes, finding myself face-to-face

with Thomas. The most fleeting moment of desire passed between us, before he suddenly reached down and seized something that had been tied loosely from my girdle belt. Taken unawares, I did not react immediately but sought instead to understand what had been stolen from me.

Then I saw it, lifted high in the air, on display for all to see as a trophy of his conquest, a gold locket suspended on a silk ribbon. Around me, the other members of our party were clapping and cheering both my success and Thomas' revenge. Suddenly, I felt afraid, yet I did not understand why. The laughter had fallen away from me, and quite out of kilter with my fellow companions, I found myself with my arm outstretched, palm facing upwards towards Thomas, as I spoke gravely, "Thomas, it is mine. Give it back to me, now!" Right there and then, in the peace and tranquillity of the gardens at Allington, I could not explain to myself why it had seemed so important that he surrender the locket. Thomas seemed vaguely puzzled

with the strength of my reaction, yet he continued to taunt me light-heartedly.

"Mistress Anne, I claim this as my prize as a token of remembrance of a sweet lady!" He bowed low in my direction, and although he kept up the cheery disposition, which encouraged our friends to applaud our performance, when he looked into my eyes, I saw the sincerity of his words reflected there.

In front of everyone, I felt that to press the matter would heap upon it more significance than I would wish. So I gave up my cause and allowed him to keep the jewel. I never saw or heard of it again until many weeks later, the day Henry and I had our first, heated argument.

Chapter Six

Hever Castle, Kent

July 21, 1527

Since leaving Allington, almost six weeks had slipped by. Thomas left Kent in late June, stopping by at our home to pay his respects to my mother and me before travelling on to join my father in London, and to continue his work as an ambassador to the King. My sister too had finally left Hever with her husband William Carey, who had been in attendance of the King. In the bewildering excitement of my arrival in this world, I completely forgot that she was already a married woman with two small children. I recalled that in the future, there would be much speculation as to whether Henry himself had fathered her children. I was desperate to ask her of the truth, yet at the same time, I was apprehensive. I surmised that this surely was a secret that

two sisters would gladly have shared. To admit my ignorance may well have seemed very strange indeed, so I held my tongue.

With my father and brother also still absent at court, the castle slipped into a sedate and reassuring pace of life. This was so befitting of the sheer beauty and tranquility of the countryside that had enfolded our little haven. We received very few visitors in those weeks and I was glad, for it allowed me to quietly observe the everyday comings and goings of Tudor life. I became familiar with the way people spoke and by watching my mother intently, how a lady of noble birth such as me would be expected to interact with all levels of society. When we received visitors, I made sure to be at my mother's side, a quiet and unassuming presence, yet all the time, drinking thirstily from the fountain of knowledge. Thankfully, I had a university education in my modern life, and so by Tudor standards, I was more than well equipped intellectually to be the rival of any man.

Indeed, I occasionally wondered with some amusement as to the real nature of Anne's noted intelligence; was this in fact an echo of her future alter ego?

When I was not with my mother, I occupied much of my time in the library, voraciously devouring book after book in a quest to understand as much as I could about this world that had seemed so strange to me at first, and yet was becoming my home. In the first couple of weeks, I also spent a good deal of time thinking of my other life. Each day, I expected to find myself returned to the 21st century and yet as each day went by, I became more indelibly ingrained into the fabric of my 16th century life. From time to time, I recalled how unwell I had felt on that day when I awoke in Anne's body. It had become like a distant memory. Anne's health was clearly strong and robust and I had never felt more alive and more vibrant. Indeed, it seemed that in such a short time, I adapted myself to playing the part of Anne

Boleyn, although back then, I still sensed myself as entirely

distinct from her; the molecules of our lives inexplicably, but temporarily, woven together. In time this would change and we would become like one, but back then, we were like oil and water, remaining separate entities.

On occasion, my mother gently enquired about my intentions to return to court. She knew about my pledge to the King and that he eagerly awaited my return. I was obliged to join Henry soon; I could not put it off much longer. I confess that part of me longed for it – to see him again; not to mention my great anticipation and nervous excitement at the thought of tasting for myself the real-life Tudor Court. Yet I sensed that in my departure from Hever, Anne would be leaving the last of her youth and innocence behind her. I was so utterly entranced by every nuance of the world that for so long, in my other life, I had yearned to taste but never believed it possible. I wanted to savour the exquisite beauty of life at Hever and so I resisted the impulse to rush forward onto London. I was also acutely aware of the many dangers that lay ahead for

Anne, and I found myself wanting to save her from her fate.



On that July morning, I awoke slowly. All night a fierce thunderstorm had raged around the castle, lighting up the sky in a magnificent display of nature's omnipotence. Thunder rolled around our little valley and kept me awake well into the early hours of the morning. I slept later than I was accustomed to. Before I opened my eyes, I knew the rain had ceased and the breeze that was coming through my little window, cleansed by nature's purge, was sweet and fresh. I stretched languidly in my bed before my eyes flickered open.

Momentarily I gasped, automatically recoiling and pulling the crisp linen sheets about me; for there was a man I did not know standing squarely at the foot of my bed. He was grinning at me broadly. Standing at probably 5 ft 10, he was of average build with broad shoulders and a narrow, slim waist. He was holding a black velvet cap, scrunched up in

his right hand. This left uncovered his slightly dishevelled, dark brown, wavy locks which were cut relatively short to his head. Strong sideburns accentuated his fine bone structure; his chiseled cheek bones and a strong square jaw gave him an attractive countenance. Like many young men of his age that I had encountered so far, this gentleman had a beard and moustache, as was the fashion. The former was small, just a band of bristles covering only his chin; the moustache similarly neat and tidy. He was dressed head to toe in black; fabrics of damask, velvet and silk were contrasted against the frill of his white, linen shirt which showed at the collar and cuffs; whilst a silver jewel was pinned at the base of his neck. I recognised the light in his eyes as that of a kindred spirit. This could only be Anne's brother, George.

"Dear sister, have you missed me?" He held his arms open as if to firmly announce his presence in case I had missed it. "For I have missed you. Although," he paused for a

moment, "I have to admit that things have become somewhat interesting at court these days!" I knew that he was referring to the King's intentions towards me. George strode round the side of the bed and came and sat on the edge of it beside me; his left leg bent up, resting on the side of the feather mattress. For a moment, I was surprised, as he reached over and gently stroked my hair which was plaited and swept across one shoulder. It was an intimate gesture, full of deep and sincere brotherly love for his elder sister. Yet suddenly, aware of the future danger that this intimacy would bring to George and Anne, I found myself flinching. I suspect it would have been imperceptible to anybody but Anne's dearly beloved brother, who withdrew his hand and looked at me quizzically.

"Are you feeling well, sister? You look somehow...not quite yourself." I nearly laughed out loud – never was a greater truth told. However, I quickly gathered my composure.

Reciprocating the tenderness of his smile with my own, I pushed the sheets back and drew my legs beneath me, kneeling on the bed next to him.

"Of course, dear brother. It's just that I wasn't expecting you, and you took me a little by surprise." Wanting to change the subject, I added, "So pray, tell me, how is the King's Grace, and what developments at court?"

Reaching inside a leather pouch clipped onto his belt, my brother withdrew a letter. I saw immediately a heavy wax seal bearing the same coat of arms that I had seen on the Royal Standard. My brother held it out to me and with a wry smile he spoke,

"The King has commanded me to deliver this letter unto you. He is much perplexed by your continued absence at court." He chuckled before going on, "in fact, it would not be an untruth to say that he pines for you, sweet sister. I have never seen such puppy dog eyes when he mentions

your name! Fancy, the King of England enslaved by the chains of passion to my sister.” However, I was not really listening. I took the letter and turned it over in my hand, feeling the rough texture of the parchment under my fingers. For a moment, I paused and ran my fingertip around the Great Seal before slipping my finger beneath the fold and pulling the wax apart. I sat back on my heels.

In reply to my own composition, I saw immediately that the letter was written in French and in Henry's own hand.

My mistress and friend,

Since I parted with you and you delivered to me that most beautiful gift (for which again I thank you right cordially) I have heard nought more from you. I have been advised by your father that you will not come to court, neither with my lady your mother, nor by any other way. If this report be true, I cannot enough marvel at it, seeing that I am well assured I have never since that time committed fault. Reassuring you now above all else that I have spoken with Katherine of the great weight that my conscience bears pertaining to our unholy union and thus hoping

you to be of great surety as regards my intentions toward you.

Praying you also that if ever before I have in any way done you offence, that you will give me your generous absolution. As God be my witness, yet again I henceforth pledge my heart to you alone, greatly desirous that so my body could be as well, as God can bring to pass if it pleases him, whom I entreat once each day for the accomplishment thereof, trusting that at length my prayer will be heard and wishing the time brief. Good lady, I beg you as a humble servant to come forth from Hever and join me forthwith at our Palace of Beaulieu, where we shall rest until the middle of August.

Written with the hand of that secretary who in heart, body and will is your loyal and most insured servant

H.aulture  *ne cherse R.*

My brother flopped backwards on the bed; one knee raised high, his arms extended above his head. He looked at me.

"So, what does it say? No, don't tell me," then in playful imitation of a lovesick king he went on, "I can't live without you, have pity on me, I beg you to return to court... etc. etc." he circled his hand languidly around in the air in a physical gesture indicating 'and so forth'.

"George, don't make fun of me!" yet I was not much concerned with his teasing. I paused for a moment savouring this incredible moment, holding a love letter from the King of England in my very hands! Then I said, "Henry says that he has told Katherine of his intentions to annul their marriage. Pray tell, how has she taken the news?" Remaining reclining on my bed, my brother replied,

"As you would expect; full of pious self righteousness. I heard tell that the King and Queen had a furious argument. Mark my words, that woman is imperious – not to mention corpulent! No wonder the King wants rid of the old hag!"

I swiped at George with the letter playfully, admonishing him for his disrespect, "George! That is St. Katherine you're talking about!" I knew that I should not be so mean, but I was suddenly gripped by an irritation towards this woman. I sensed that even in those early days of Henry and Anne's romance, there was little love lost between them. "And no doubt she blames it all on me?" I cocked my head to the side, quizzically.

George lifted himself up, supporting himself on one hand whilst resting the other on his bent knee. "Of course," he said casting his eyes downwards, clearly searching for the right words; finally, he said, "Anne, I think you should hear it from me rather than from some tittle-tattle at court. She is... has... called you..."

"A whore?" Of course, I knew full well of Katherine's opinion of Anne Boleyn, the 'scandal of Christendom'. George flinched. It clearly both hurt and angered at him to

hear the honour of his favourite sister so defamed. "Think nought of it, my brother. We must seek to rise above such malicious slander." At this, I swung my legs over the side of the bed and still with the letter in my hand, made my way to the cabinet and the casket which lay within. I took the box out whilst my brother spoke again. "So what happens now?"

"Now?" I turned to look at my brother. "Now, sweet brother, I come to court. I have tarried here long enough. No doubt Katherine will do all she can to deviate the King from his chosen path and we must ensure that she's not successful." It was one of those moments in which I felt Anne take control and speak through me. As I placed the letter from Henry safely inside the casket, I sensed a cold and steely resolve take a hold of me. Katherine had her chance with Henry, and Anne was not about to give her another one.

"Now, George, leave me to dress. Send up a maid if you will. I will come and join you and mother shortly, and then we can make our plans." George pulled himself up from the

bed, as he passed he kissed me lightly on the cheek, and then withdrew from the room, leaving me to contemplate the many wonders and intrigues that lay ahead.

Chapter Seven

Journey to Beaulieu

July 22, 1527

Our plans were made for the journey to Beaulieu. Our arrival was imminent, so we sent a messenger on ahead to warn the King, who was in the midst of his summer progress, and was shortly due to arrive at the palace himself. On the morning of our departure, I took refuge in the library one last time. Whilst waiting for our horses to be made ready, I made myself comfortable reclining in one of the window seats, which looked out across the moat towards the fields and woodland beyond. Thankfully, it was a fine day for travelling; bright and clear with a cool breeze. On this occasion, for my reading material, I selected a small and ancient leather-bound 'Book of Hours', which I was now thumbing through carefully. It was not hard to be

in awe of the immaculate handwritten prose and astonishingly beautiful illuminations which brought the words to life. It was an exquisite piece of artwork, which I often admired during my visits to the library. Strange in some ways, as this was such a little book and there were so many more impressive volumes that I could have chosen. Yet somehow, this book kept calling my name. Whilst pondering this, I heard the door creak open and my mother entered.

"I thought I would find you here, child. These books will be lonely without you." She made her way across the room and I could see she was curious as to what I was holding in my hand. I spoke before she had a chance to ask.

"It is a Book of Hours, mother. I find something familiar and comfortable within its pages," I explained, although I knew it was not necessary to do so. My mother looked down over my shoulder; the lightness of expression that

comes from seeing an old friend lit up her face.

"Ah! That book belonged to my mother." I could tell immediately that echoing Anne's relationship with her own mother, theirs had been a close one, full of love and affection. It was unusual, I imagined, in a time that was not known for such tender and expressive love to be shared between a parent and child. I suspected in that moment, I understood a little more of how Elizabeth Boleyn had managed to create such a close relationship with her own children.

"Why do you not make use of it yourself?" I asked puzzled.

"Your father gave me a Book of Hours shortly after our marriage. I think I put it aside then, and in truth, had forgotten all about it." She smiled down at me, studying my face for a short time before she spoke again. "But since it speaks to you directly daughter, then I heartily give it to you. Wherever you go, may its constancy remind you not

only of God's love for you but of your mother's love which knows no bounds." Suddenly, I felt tears sting at the back of my eyes, for I could not remember the love of my own, beloved mother. Already, it became the most treasured of gifts and something that I swore would always remain at my side. I stood up, holding my arms out; my mother fell into them and we embraced. When we finally pulled apart, she spoke again. "The horses are ready now, child." She took hold of my shoulders firmly in both hands. "It is time for us to leave."

Arm in arm, we left the room, bidding farewell to those servants who were to remain behind to look after the castle and who now lined up by the front door to wish us Godspeed. As we made our way into the courtyard, three horses had been prepared and my brother, already mounted on his fine rouncy awaited our arrival. I could see that we were to be accompanied by a small retinue of our servants and several carts which were precariously laden

with various trunks containing our clothes and most precious belongings. A stable boy held the reins of my horse. With great satisfaction, I noted it was the same black palfrey which I had ridden with the King during the day of the hunt. As I approached, the stable boy smiled at me and spoke with pride,

"Titan has been looking forward to seeing you, Mistress". I smiled back. I now knew the name of my horse. He had been a joy to ride during the hunt and I found myself eagerly anticipating the journey ahead. I was somewhat relieved to learn that we would make the journey to Beaulieu on horseback rather than by carriage. The sway of the horse and the fresh open-air suited me much better than the pokey confines and sharp jolting of the suspension-less carriage.

"Thank you." I said to him, as a groom helped me up into the saddle. Before long, we were making our way yet again down the winding lane, leaving behind the place that had

become home to me over these past few weeks, as it disappeared from view behind lush, green hedgerows and leafy trees.

The journey took us five full days. I completely failed to appreciate that in order to reach Beaulieu, which was near Chelmsford in Essex, we had to pass through the City of London; the only place where there was a bridge that allowed us to cross the River Thames. It was indeed exciting. After two days riding, as we approached the capital, I marvelled at the beauty of the Tudor skyline; pricked often by beautiful, twisted, red-brick Tudor chimneys.

Buildings such as Westminster Abbey, which of course I recognised, and another cathedral I assumed to be the old, Gothic St Paul's, dominated the panorama and dwarfed the many houses nestled around them. Entering the suburbs, the fields of the open countryside began to melt away; I could see up close the many timber-framed, wattle and daub

dwelling of the everyday London merchant, set against the grander brick-built residences of the city's affluent aristocratic classes.

It was the oddest thing to see the city that I had been brought up in devoid of cars. The noise of the engine replaced by the clattering of hooves on the cobblestones, the shouting of traders selling their wares, and the occasional shout or laughter emanating from the local alehouse. In short, the predominant noise was not of machines but of people, and it made a wonderfully refreshing change. Compared to the countryside to which I had become accustomed, London was abuzz with life. Elegantly dressed nobleman and well-to-do merchants with their horses, fine clothes and jewels stood out in breathtaking contrast to the coarse and plain appearance of the city's poor. Our party must have seemed more regal than most, for many people, wealthy and poor alike, stepped aside allowing us to make our way easily through the narrow and crowded byways;

often bowing their heads or doffing their caps as we made to pass by. Riding along the urban streets, I was struck by how tightly packed the houses were. Only the largest and grandest of houses occupied a generous plot with elegant, private gardens that could be seen stretching down to the Thames.

We rested overnight at Norfolk House, the Howard family's London residence which sat close to the Archbishop of Canterbury's home, Lambeth Palace, on the south bank of the Thames. In 21st century London, the pretty little Tudor facade of Lambeth Palace was one of the few 16th century buildings that survived the passage of nearly five hundred years. I passed it many times in my 21st century life; it always looked so quaint, a palace dwarfed by modern buildings that had gradually encroached upon it. Yet now, of course, it assumed its true grandeur, as the London residence of the Premier Prelate in the land. Next to the Howard residence, it was one of the grandest and most notable buildings on the south bank of the river. Of course,

my mother was the sister of the Duke of Norfolk, and as part of the family, we were made heartily welcome. However, the Duke himself, along with other notable members of Henry's court, including my father, had already left London accompanying the King on his summer progress.

Ravenous from the journey and the plentiful fresh air, we dined well and slept soundly that night in preparation for the next leg of our journey. When I finally awoke the next morning to the sound of the bells of St Paul's ringing out across the city, I was bursting with both apprehension and excitement; in Anne's shoes, I was on the brink of tasting the glittering spectacle, and the deadly ruthlessness, of the Tudor court.



We were up bright and early, ready to recommence our journey. I made my way from our lodgings through the

Grand Entrance Hall to meet my mother and brother who were ahead of me and already in the courtyard beyond. Suddenly, a small child appeared from one of the nearby rooms; approximately five or six years of age, and of slight frame with auburn hair, she was running furiously away from another, slightly older child, who was close behind in hot pursuit. So engrossed was she in the chase that she entirely failed to see me and collided full force into my billowing skirts before I could step aside. The girl fell backwards onto the floor with a bump, and I immediately knelt down to help lift to her feet; thankfully, she seemed unharmed. Like most small children, it seemed that falling down was a matter of course. For a moment she stood there, studying me intently and clearly wondering who I was. There we stood for a few fleeting moments before her governess appeared from one of the nearby passageways.

"Katherine Howard, you are always up to mischief! I do so wish you would be more careful! Now apologise to Mistress

Anne and let us be on our way." For a moment the two of us, a small child and a grown woman, were held in a crucible of shared destiny. I could not take my eyes from this child's face, so full of life and wonderment was it. She was my little cousin, Katherine Howard, who I assumed must have been visiting from Horsham in Norfolk, as my reading had told me. This girl, who at sixteen and against all probability, will follow Anne to become Queen of England as the fated fifth wife of Henry VIII. The little girl then broke the spell. She curtsied deferentially and said,

"Forgive me, my lady. I did not mean to be so clumsy." With that she curtsied a second time, before racing off to join her governess who - along with the other child - was led back into the depths of the house.



On our journey across the City of London, I was struck how the houses gave way unexpectedly to green open spaces. At

one point, we rode along the track that wrapped itself around the northern edge of the Tower of London. In my 21st century life, this building, although imposing by its very nature, was surrounded by large and elegant Georgian facades and modern office blocks. Busy roads swept by its outer walls, leaving the Tower to cling on to the embankment of the Thames for dear life. Yet in the 16th century, the Tower dominated this part of London. It was surrounded by a sweeping expanse of space which I assumed to be Tower Green; the place where common traitors were beheaded. Beyond the Green, surrounding the Tower, was a modest smattering of ordinary dwellings.

I looked up at the fortress, remembering my many visits here in my modern life. I recalled how unsettling I found this menacing place; thinking oftentimes of Anne and the men who had been imprisoned with her in May 1536. I often felt a deep pain ripping at my heart as I imagined their suffering; and yet, here I am now, Anne Boleyn, a

prisoner in the Tower. I suddenly felt icy cold in the summer heat, as a wave of dread washed over me. No matter how hard I tried, I could not shake from my mind that if fate was to take its course, then in less than ten years, my bones would eventually lie in the cold earth beneath the paving stones of the chapel of St Peter ad Vincula, the tiny chapel within the Tower walls. I must have looked temporarily unwell, as my brother enquired after my health and reassured me that we would soon reach the open air of the countryside beyond.

It took another two days of riding to leave London behind us and enter the county of Essex. On the third day, we found ourselves approaching the Palace of Beaulieu. Listening to the conversations between my mother and brother, I learned with interest that my father had sold the palace to Henry in 1516. I wondered, at the time, if Anne herself had visited here as a child before her departure to the continent; an experience that would transform the very

fabric of her personality and carve out her destiny as Queen of England. Lost in these very thoughts, I suddenly had a flash of an image that seemed like a memory, and yet it was not familiar to me; a montage of blurred and hazy pictures had filled my mind. I seemed to be seeing through the eyes of a small child. I was perhaps of seven or eight and was playing with another child of similar age. We were laughing gaily as we dipped our hands into the water of a pond, which surrounded a central fountain. The fountain itself was carved from marble, sculpted into figurines of small cherub-like angels dancing at the feet of the partially-clad body of a woman, who reminded me of a Grecian or Romanesque figure. Within moments the images had gone. It felt strange, as if the pictures were not my own, and yet I had seen those things through my own eyes. However, as we turned into the long, tree-lined driveway that led up to the palace, I quickly forgot the incident; I was in awe of the building that lay before me as it took my breath away in its exquisite beauty.

The long drive up to the Palace of Beaulieu is lined on each side with a double row of mature oak trees. In the open parkland beyond, herds of deer grazed contentedly. Only as we passed, did they cease their grazing and with numerous eyes upon us, attentively watch our steady progress until they were assured that we were no threat to their safety. At the end of the driveway, we were met by a huge red-brick Gatehouse; two enormous octagonal towers, bejewelled with fine mullioned windows, stood guard on either side of the Gateway itself. Riding beneath it, I gazed up at the delicately carved royal coat of arms which declared to all the omnipotence of the mighty Prince who now owned it. As I was to find out, Beaulieu was certainly not the most magnificent, nor grandest of Henry's palaces; but it did have a gentle charm with pleasant airy rooms, fine views across the idyllic Essex countryside, and tranquil formal gardens. Like most Tudor palaces, the most elegant of these rooms was built around a large inner courtyard; the finest of which were reserved for the State Apartments. As might be

expected, these were also the rooms which commanded the most magnificent views across the gardens and parkland. Beyond that, a series of more irregular and smaller buildings, such as the castle's kitchens, other service areas, and quarters for servants and minor nobility, made up the rest of the Palace.

As we drew up outside the main entrance, Sir Thomas emerged from within the palace to welcome us. Greeting us with kisses, he wasted no time in showing us the way to our lodgings. As we walked along, my father took me by the arm, my mother and brother falling back discreetly so that we were able to talk more intimately. My father wasted no time in getting straight to the point.

"The King is eager to see you and is delighted that you have come again to court. He has asked that as soon as you are settled you should visit him in his Privy Chamber. As often as possible, I, your mother or brother, will of

course be present to act as your chaperone." Almost as an aside he went on, "The King has made his intentions clear that for the sake of your reputation, you should not be seen to be alone in privy company with His Grace." We ambled along through a multitude of corridors; I listened intently. I could not help but be aware of how matters that were so close to my own heart were being decided by men behind closed doors, without my involvement. This did not sit comfortably with my modern day persona; a young woman who was so independent and in control of her own life.

My father continued, "As you know, the King has spoken with Katherine of his intentions to annul his marriage to her as soon as he is able to secure a dispensation from the Pope. In truth, many learned men see that the case is not straightforward, yet his Majesty anticipates that by Christmas at the very latest, the two of you will be openly betrothed." I nodded silently, of course deeply sceptical – and yet for some reason ridiculously hopeful – that this could be achieved. He hesitated to tell me the next thing on

his mind. "His Grace has asked that I broach a rather delicate subject with you." I stopped abruptly, dropping my father's arm as I turned squarely to look him in the face. An ominous cloud was gathering and I felt suddenly apprehensive at what he was about to say. Taking a deep breath, my father explained, "His Majesty has asked that you continue in the service of Queen Katherine, he..."

"What! Surely this cannot be!" I interrupted him before he could go on. Of course I was furious with my father, and with Henry, for bringing me back into a situation in which Anne had clearly had her fill. "Does his Majesty have any idea how impossible... how difficult... how utterly demeaning it is for me to be washing the feet of a woman who loathes me and wishes me dead!" Anne had emerged to take charge again, as emotions and words poured forth in a passionate torrent of anger. "Did he not listen to me when I explained this to him?" I said this almost to myself

as, with some agitation, I paced back and forth in front of my father.

"Anne, Anne, please calm down." I noticed that my father had become anxious and was glancing up and down the corridor to ensure that we were not being overheard. Suddenly, he gripped my shoulders and our eyes locked, as he spoke to me with great fervour, "You must understand this. The King has begun to seek an annulment from the Pope. Many people at court do not know that he loves you and intends for you to be his bride. God forbid that they should at this stage! It is imperative that the King's Grace is seen to be seeking this annulment on the grounds that he is living in sin with his brother's wife and that his conscience, in the sight of God, can no longer abjure it."

Already, I felt my anger and fight beginning to drain away from me in shame. In my naïveté, I did not see fully the

political necessity of my remaining in the shadows for as long as possible during this sensitive time. My father continued, lowering his voice, "We must not do anything to jeopardise our cause. You do not yet understand the full ruthlessness of our enemies. For all intents and purposes, the King must appear to be living with, and paying due deference to his Queen. Now, you are a lady at court and as such it is your duty to give service to Katherine. Your time will come, child. Have patience." I fell quiet and nodded my head silently, although still simmering with hurt. "Good," was all that my father had replied.

Our party continued to walk onwards, and my father delivered his instructions, expecting no further objections from his head-strong daughter. "You will change and meet the King. Later your uncle Norfolk has asked that we should join him in his chamber for supper. There is much to discuss. You will also need to present yourself to Katherine. She is aware of your return to court. However, methinks that given the late hour, you can do this in the

morning."

"I imagine she can hardly wait!" I said rather sarcastically. My father tactfully ignored my comments and in short order we arrived at our apartments. The door was opened for us by the page that was waiting outside. As it swung inwards, I was aware that the next act in the drama of Anne Boleyn was about to get underway.



Our apartments at Beaulieu were spacious and richly decorated. Clearly, the King had ordered that our family be housed in accommodation befitting our rising status at court. The most striking features of the apartment as I remember were a series of large stone windows which let in an abundance of light and which afforded us views across the Privy Gardens. My father, however, informed us that, for the

sake of propriety, we had been housed at a respectable distance from the King's own chambers.

This series of interconnecting rooms provided us with a grand reception room; in the centre of which was a huge oak dining table, large enough to seat at least eight people, and separate bedrooms for my parents, my brother and myself. As I stood in the main parlour, I started to peel off my elegant, leather riding gloves; all the time watching a stream of servants scuttle back and forth bringing up those belongings that followed us from Hever. My mother was busy issuing orders to a Gentleman Usher and one of her personal maids, whilst my father had already returned his attention to some paperwork, which he had abandoned on hearing of our arrival. My brother promptly wandered off, no doubt to inspect his own chambers. At that moment, there came a knock at the open door. I glanced over, as did my parents, to find a page in the Royal livery standing in the doorway. As head of the household, my father rose from his

seat and had walked over to him.

"From the King's Grace - for Mistress Anne" the page said, as he nodded towards me and offering up a silver platter. I sauntered over, peeling the second glove from my hand as I did so. There was a letter and a long package wrapped in red velvet lying upon it. Taking it, I thanked him cordially and watched him bow, turn and disappear. My brother re-entered the room from his chambers and all eyes were upon me; I laid the velvet pouch down on the oak table. Cross with myself from my show of intemperance earlier, I opened the package nonchalantly, revealing a beautiful gold necklace at the centre of which was crafted an array of roses entwined with two lovers' hearts, all studded with rubies and diamonds. Peering over my shoulder, my brother let out a high-pitched whistle in acknowledgement of its beauty and value. I left it untouched, rather reaching for the letter which accompanied it. Breaking the sealed wax, I unfolded the parchment to see

Henry's now familiar handwriting. The note was brief and in English:

Dear mistress and friend,

The approach of the time for which I have so long waited rejoices me so much, that it seems almost to have come already. However, the entire accomplishment cannot be till the two persons meet, which meeting is more desired by me than anything in this world; for what joy can be greater upon earth than to have the company of her who is dearest to me, knowing likewise that she does the same on her part, the thought of which gives me the greatest pleasure.

*Written by the hand of the secretary, who wishes himself at this moment privately with you, and who is, and always will be, Your loyal and most assured
Servant,*

HR

I pushed the letter over to my father who duly read it aloud. Speaking resolutely, I announced, "I will change

and then visit the King." By this time, thankfully, I had regained my composure, although in truth, I felt stirrings; an intoxicating mixture of passion and excitement already beginning to take shape in the centre of my belly. I indicated to Bess who was hovering in the background, and who had joined us from Hever, to follow me into my bedchamber and help me change.

When I emerged some short time later, I must have looked truly resplendent, as wealthy as any noblewoman at court; even my mother was taken aback by my glittering appearance. Henry's diamond and ruby necklace had not been the only gift he had given me that day. When I entered my bedroom, I found three of the most exquisite and divinely glamorous gowns laid out for me – all gifts from the King. The first was a heavy winter gown of black damask and velvet, its long sleeves were generously trimmed with the softest sable fur, whilst the edge of the kirtle, just visible about the square-cut neckline studded with precious

and semi-precious jewels. The next gown was in the English style and made of dusky blue silk. However, it was the third dress which I chose to wear for my reunion with Henry. The gown itself was made of silk, this time in the colour of deep raspberry red. As with the other gowns, there was a flattering, low-cut, square neckline which gave way to dress which was almost entirely covered with the most exquisite silver thread work; this had been woven into the fabric in a fashionable geometric pattern.. Typical of the French style gown, the sleeves were tightly fitted from the shoulder to the elbow and turned back with velvet. Elaborate false sleeves, ended in the redwork frill of my underlying chemise, which in turn fell over Anne's delicate hands thus accentuating the narrowness of her long fingers. It was not the first time that I noticed the absence of any deformity on either of Anne's little fingers.

These gifts were the first trickle of the tokens of Henry's affection which he bestowed upon me during those heady summer months. It was a trickle that would soon become a

torrent. He seemed eager to lavish every imaginable luxury upon me. I received not only jewellery such as bracelets, brooches, rings and necklaces but also diamonds for a new headdress, gilt and silver bindings for books, gowns, bows and arrows and an exquisitely carved leather saddle for my palfrey. It was flattering of course and, at first, a little overwhelming. Sometimes however, in my more melancholy moments, I could not help but feel that my love was being bought and how easily the torrent could stop just as soon as it had started – and of course, eventually, it did.



However, I was ready to meet the King and my father and brother accompanied me to Henry's Privy Chambers. Rather than entering through some of the grander, more public, rooms, we were escorted by one of Henry's liveried servants through a more inconspicuous corridor which I later came to understand was a gallery designed for the King's

private use. Beyond this, we were guided through a series of deserted chambers which were truly breathtaking in their magnificence. Finally, we entered Henry's private chapel. The servant indicated that we had permission to pass by the two armed guards who stood on either side of the entrance. The door opened and my father gestured for me to lead the way and step inside.

Once within the sanctum of the Chapel, I stood still for a moment, taking in the sheer beauty of the scene lay before me. As Henry's private place of prayer, it was relatively small and intimate. The walls were made of stone; a larger outer room was separated from a smaller one which lay beyond by an arch carved in the Romanesque style. Within the inner sanctum, I was struck by the stonework which was adorned by a repeating geometric pattern, and which in its vibrant colours of gold and red, seemed to bring the walls to life. Beyond the archway, the smallest part of the chapel had three small Gothic style windows, each

decorated with stained glass. The window directly above the altar had a picture of the Risen Christ, adored by angels. In the late afternoon sunlight, it caught the last of the sun's rays and a beam of light danced with the colours of the stained glass, lighting up the room as if it were transmitting a message from God himself. The raised altar carried a magnificent and weighty silver cross which had been finely worked, whilst scattered around the room were numerous beeswax candles, which were lit despite the fact that it was still light outside. I drew in a deep breath and a heavy scent of incense filled my nostrils, plunging me instantly back into long forgotten memories of attending mass with my parents as a child.

I was brought up in the Catholic faith, and as the service had changed little over the centuries, still steeped in tradition, the practices of mass, the prayers and incantations were profoundly familiar to me. I also attended mass at least twice a day with my mother while we had whiled away those

happy weeks at Hever. Although in my modern life, I felt deeply spiritual, I had long since abandoned religious observance. Nevertheless, I quickly found myself to be at home in this environment once more; from those very earliest days, the ritual provided me with a sense of grounding in that strange, new world that was fast becoming home. And without any other obvious means of finding spiritual comfort, I would soon immerse myself in the everyday, religious observance of Tudor society, holding my own God silently within my heart.

I looked ahead of me to Henry who was kneeling in front of the altar on a *prieu-dieu*. With my hands clasped lightly in front of me, I walked toward the King; my father and brother remaining behind, kneeling discreetly at the pews in the back of the chapel. As I moved forward, the soles of my shoes had struck the tiled, chequered floor and alerted Henry to my presence. Approaching the archway, Henry turned to look over his right shoulder at me. When he saw me, his face lit up with joy and in response, I sank into a deep

and graceful curtsy. Without a word, he beckoned me over and indicated that I should kneel by his side and join him in prayer.

When our prayers were completed, accompanied again by my father and brother, Henry proposed that we promenade in the Privy Gardens, so that we could enjoy the early evening sunshine together. Since he set eyes on me in the chapel, he was in high spirits and attentive to my every need. Indeed, before we had left the chapel he had been unable to contain himself. And so, in the relative privacy of the church, Henry kissed me tenderly on the lips, holding held me close for the longest time; as if to let me go would cause me to dissolve away into thin air. I was sure that I had seen tears of joy welling up in his eyes when he first saw me, and yet again I felt the flush of exhilaration from his singular adoration. As we walked outside, I noticed that the Privy Gardens were empty save our little party and the ever present bodyguards that kept watch over the King.

Soon we turned into the sunken garden, for a moment I stood still and must have drawn in my breath, for the King seemed startled and turned towards me, enquiring, "Sweetheart, are you all right?" The skin of his forehead between his eyes was slightly pinched in consternation as he spoke. For a moment, I was lost in my own thoughts, astonished to find myself looking at a marble fountain with a semi-nude lady, surrounded by cherubs dancing at her feet. It was the very same fountain that I saw in my vision as we approached the Palace of Beaulieu. I remember how perplexed I had been at its appearance; what could it mean? Had I for the first time had access to Anne's memory? How had that been possible?

"Sweetheart?" The King's words broke the spell as I shook my thoughts away; shrugging it off outwardly as being a consequence of the breathtaking beauty of this pretty little space. Henry and I continued on, walking arm in arm, the crunch of tiny stones beneath our feet on the path. I spoke

first, "I thank you kindly Sire for the very beautiful gifts that you have bestowed on me." I let go of Henry's arm, turning to face him, displaying in its full glory the magnificent ruby and diamond necklace that Henry had given me. With some inner satisfaction, I saw how his eyes widened as he appreciated not only the jewel but the long neck, sculpted collarbones and modestly raised breast against which it was set off. Inwardly I smiled, as I mused that clearly some things about men certainly had not changed in the last five hundred years. Henry took a step back to take in my entire appearance. He smiled broadly, one of those smiles of his that could light up a room, if you were lucky enough to be the recipient.



Those days are but a distant memory now from my prison here in the Tower, but there was a time when he looked upon me that way. Henry had a way of making you feel like the centre of the world, if that was his will.

Appreciatively, he finally said, "mine own darling, you look truly magnificent; every inch the Queen which I intend you to become." As I pointed to the rich jewellery and gown that I was wearing I commented "You do realise don't you, Henry, that people will notice all this!". Then I added more circumspectly, "the Queen will notice all this."

"Ah, I see Mistress Anne refers to my request that she maintains service upon the Queen," he replied, then quickly added, "for the time being." He grinned at me mischievously, I could not help but feel that at heart, Henry felt awkward about his request and was now trying to defuse it with humour. I had already seen the folly of my naïveté when confronted by my father on the subject and was determined to accept Henry's request graciously. However, ever willful, even at that stage I felt the need to make plain my reservations.

"Of course, your Majesty is most wise and I see the

discretion in these matters is important. Yet I must confess that I approach your request with some trepidation. Katherine will see immediately how high and how fast I am rising in your affections, and now that she knows of your plans for an annulment, I'm quite sure that she will make my life unbearable!"

"Anne, sweetheart, do not worry. I have been waiting to tell you myself that I am already arranging a delegation to travel to Rome to request a dispensation from the Pope to allow the annulment of my marriage to Katherine. I have also sent Wolsey to France to canvass Francis for his support in the matter. Granted there are... difficulties. The political situation does not carry in our favour. Yet Popes understand the pressing issues of Princes and I'm confident that we will have our dispensation, and you and I will be married by the end of the year. Then all will be well, my love," he said as he took hold of both my hands and raised them to his lips.

"I will do you as you ask, My Lord, but," I paused, hardly

believing that I was about to set conditions for the King of England, "I will do so only until the end of the year. By then, I suspect I shall be going mad and will not be able to tolerate it a moment longer!" Henry was unconcerned by my ultimatum. He was supremely confident in being able to bring to bear whatever he desired. That was the end of our discussion about Katherine. We continued to walk in the garden, engrossed in each other's company, as I listened to Henry's plans for our wedding, for our future and for England. It was a beautiful fairytale and I confess that I foolishly allowed myself to be swept up into those castles in the air.



Later that evening, my family joined my uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, in his chambers for dinner. I noticed immediately that it was a room of similar proportions to our own apartments at Beaulieu. Despite the fact that my uncle

Norfolk was the premier peer in the land, clearly the Boleyns were already riding very high in the King's affections. Outside, the sun was fast descending in the sky. It was a spectacular sunset; a solitary shaft of light cut through the broken cloud as if it were a stairway to heaven itself. The sky was awash with hues of orange, red, yellow and violet, illuminating the room and our faces in a soft and warm glow.

I was somewhat anxious about meeting Thomas Howard, the Third Duke of Norfolk. I knew a considerable amount about him and that Anne had a notoriously difficult relationship with her uncle. I tried so very hard to keep an open mind, to meet him afresh on my own terms. Yet I could not put aside my knowledge that even as Anne's uncle, Norfolk had done nothing to try and save her and her co-accused during those tragic days of her downfall. Not only that, he appeared to take some vindictive pleasure in chiding her as she was arrested at Greenwich Palace. By

that time, I had been in Anne's body long enough to sense her feelings about people and situations; I could clearly feel her mistrust and disdain for her uncle. As I sat directly across from Thomas Howard at the dining table, I could appreciate Anne's cool reserve towards the Duke. Already in his mid fifties, Thomas Howard struck me as being a singularly austere and joyless man. He greeted our family with little warmth, and although our plate overflowed with food and wine, he was miserly in his emotional generosity.

In stature, he was relatively tall and slender, dressed elegantly and befitting his rank in a black damask doublet and hose, set off by a surcoat trimmed with fur. A gold collar was set about his shoulders and three gold rings set with rubies and sapphires brought attention to his somewhat gnarled and bony fingers. However, what was most striking to me was his rugged profile, with a large and slightly protuberant nose and a rather pronounced and pointed chin. Overall, his face was long and drawn and I never shy away

from the fact that he reminded me of a vulture. How perversely prophetic that seems to me now.

He addressed much of the conversation to my father, who was cordial enough in his replies, although it struck me that no great warmth existed between the two of them. Theirs was clearly a practical arrangement, as I felt would be the case with most relationships in the Duke's life. Occasionally, he glanced at me as if adjusting his image of Anne in the light of his understanding that perhaps, one day, she would be the Queen of England. Yet when our eyes briefly met, there was no appreciation of me as a person, just a cool and calculating appraisal of what I could, and could not do, for Thomas Howard. After the Gentlemen Ushers served up our main course, my uncle Norfolk sat back in his grand wainscot chair, resting his hands squarely on each of its arms; he then spoke to me directly for the first time.

"So, your father tells me that the King has asked you to

marry him." I understood this was a statement and not a question. Thus, I did not reply but continued to listen, whilst keeping my gaze fixed firmly on my plate as I began to eat. Undaunted, my uncle continued; "It will not be easy to get an annulment from his marriage to Katherine. Her nephew, the Emperor Charles V controls the Vatican, and the Pope will not want to upset him. But your elevation brings great opportunity to our house and we must do all we can to ensure a happy outcome." Then quite out of the blue, my uncle had asked me, "Have you slept with the King yet?"

"Brother! Anne is pure and chaste girl, a God-fearing girl. How can you ask such questions!" Rarely had I heard my mother speak up in the presence of men, but she was indeed angry that her brother had suggested I was capable of inciting adultery. Norfolk did not flinch or respond to her. He kept his gaze fixed upon me. Slowly, I looked up from my plate, putting down my knife in the process as I prepared myself to speak. Mirroring my uncle, I sat back defiantly in my chair. With all the grace and cutting sarcasm I could

muster – as Anne had clearly also taken exception to his remark – I spoke; not once did I break eye contact with the Duke.

"Your Grace, I believe," I hesitated consciously to give a derisory emphasis to my uncertainty about the following fact, "you are a man yourself. However, despite this being the case, I see that you do not understand men at all. Our King is a charismatic and mighty Prince, who desires me above all else. If you possessed the wisdom of a woman in these matters, Your Grace, you would understand that until you have the prize in your hand, you must never give a man what he desires." My impertinence had been breathtaking, and deathly silence descended upon the room. My uncle remained motionless, only the small slight twitching of the muscle in his jaw told me that I had well overstepped the mark, as he simmered with indignation.

After a few moments of excruciating silence, I rose slowly from my chair and spoke again, "I fear that the journey has

overtired me and I find that my head hurts. I thank Your Grace most humbly for your hospitality and beg your pardon to retire to my chambers." I did not wait for permission to leave, but curtsied before pushing my chair back and leaving the room. As the door to the outer chamber closed behind me, I heard my father apologising for my abruptness. My heart pounded wildly in my chest. I was not as courageous as Anne, and certainly in my modern day life, not as intemperate. When her consciousness took over me, as I would find Anne was apt to do in moments of high emotion, I always found myself both in awe of her courage and passion - and at the same time, somewhat frightened by them.

As I walked away, I remembered only too clearly a rather infamous comment that the Duke of Norfolk once made about his relationship with Anne. He remarked that, "She spoke to him no better than one would speak to a dog". I think it was about that time that I began to understand well

that Anne was a girl caught in an immensely difficult situation, one that brought out both the best and worst out in her. At her best, she was witty, intelligent, passionate and charismatic. At her worst she could be cutting, volatile, haughty and her intrepid courage caused her to go, sometimes rashly, where angels feared to tread. I may have defended my dignity with my Uncle but in the aftermath, I had already made life more difficult for myself. I shuddered at the thought of it as I returned to my rooms.

Chapter Eight

The Palace of Beaulieu

July 28th, 1527

When I awoke the next morning, a flood of memories from my exchange with my uncle Norfolk washed over me before I had barely opened my eyes. I groaned, turning over and burying my head beneath my pillow, as if I could hide from the repercussions of my actions. I knew that I would face a sharp reprimand from my father for my rudeness. So, when Bess bustled into the room sometime later in order to assist me in getting dressed, I was reluctant to rise. I was filled with gloom, not only at facing the consequences of my words to my uncle Norfolk, but also with the realisation that on this morning I would have to present myself to the Queen.

Outside, the warm tranquillity of the previous evening had

given way to a grey, wet and blustery day. I peered beyond my windows, watching an angry smudge of rain pass across the horizon, as I traced rivulets of rainwater down the glass with my finger. It seemed that Mother Nature perfectly mirrored my mood on that July day. As it turned out, the largely warm and sunny weather which I had experienced since my arrival in the 16th century had been a welcome break in a year which was renowned as being particularly wet, even in England. Many people commented on how it rained incessantly from the middle of April until the end of May, shortly before my arrival in Anne's world. Bar the odd and very welcome break in the dreary weather, we had seen very few sunny days as summer eventually gave way to the chill of the encroaching winter.

In the weeks that followed, the inclement weather intensified the passions and tensions at court, as we had all been cooped up indoors for days at a time; Henry, Katherine and I living cheek by jowl in an increasingly tense *ménage à*

trois. On that momentous day, in an attempt to keep a low profile, I instructed Bess to fetch a plain gown of grey satin and kirtle of grey damask; I chose a simple crucifix to set against my French hood, which was studded with pearls. When I emerged from my rooms, I was relieved to find that my father and brother had already gone to attend on the King. My mother eyed me cautiously as we broke our fast. In truth, I could not tell whether she was angry with me, or admired me, for standing up to her brother. From the very start, I knew that my mother loved me intensely and unconditionally and yet I sensed, like many other people, she sometimes found herself in awe of her daughter; wondering from where she could have drawn such fierce intellect and bravery.

Before I left our apartments, I snatched up the Book of Hours that she gave to me before we left Hever and attached it to the gold chain clipped at my waist. We walked together silently, and somewhat nervously, toward the Queen's

private chambers. I think my mother also felt apprehensive at how Katherine would treat her daughter now that events seemed to be turning against her. At the doors to the Queen's apartments, my mother kissed me and wished me well. I sensed that she wanted to tell me, to urge me, to be dignified and keep a low profile – which was somewhat laughable when I considered how impossible that task would be in such close proximity to the Queen. However, I reassured her and said calmly,

"Do not worry, mother. I promise that I will be the gracious and dutiful servant of the Queen." I squeezed her hand lightly and smiled, as with slight mirth I went on, "I shall try with every fibre of my being not to embarrass you or father any further" With that, we bid each other farewell. As the Yeoman Guard opened the door to Katherine's outer chambers, I took a deep breath and mustering every ounce of self-possession that I could, I stepped inside.

Passing through the busy Great Watching Chamber, I found myself in the Queen's Presence Chamber. Following the same template of the other royal palaces, this was the second largest of her public chambers at Beaulieu. It was a place in which those courtiers who wished to petition or gain favour from the Queen would seek an audience. The room was already quite full of people and a buzz of speculation filled the air. As I reached up on tiptoes to peer over the gathered crowd, I saw Katherine on her throne, under her canopy of estate, at the far end of the chamber. I was just one of many who gathered that morning to be introduced to, or to seek patronage, of the Queen.

For a moment I hesitated, feeling unsure as to what I must do next, then thankfully, out of nowhere, a voice called out to me and I turned to see a young woman, perhaps just a little older than myself, walking toward me out of the crowd.

"Anne! How marvellous you are back at court at last!" Clearly we were friends. She was a delicate little thing

with a neat and trim figure. Her French hood sat well back on her head; she had the most beautiful, blond hair and unusual but captivating hazel brown eyes. Her golden tresses were a startling contrast against a gown of the deepest blue velvet; the raised collar was open about her neck and a sapphire brooch pinned at the centre of the bodice. Like many ladies of my age, she wore the most fashionable style of sleeve; tight fitting at the shoulder, cut long and voluminous around the cuff. I would soon learn that this attractive young woman was Anne Gainsford, a dear friend who would be with me until the very end.

Many names that I heard in those first few weeks were familiar to me but frustratingly, with a good number, I was unable to remember the nature of their involvement or whether they were a friend or foe of Anne's. However, there were some, such as Anne Gainsford, who stood out in my memory from my reading of history. Anne – or 'Nan' as she became known to me – was one of life's true

survivors. I knew that she would become one of my inner circle of friends and that she would live to be an old lady, dying only in her nineties – a veritable miracle given the age. Nan would provide history with snippets of some of Anne Boleyn's most personal conversations and intimate moments, through the biography that her grandson, George Wyatt would write based on her memories of our time together. From the first moment that I met her, I could tell that Nan had a vibrancy about her – an infectious enthusiasm which was quite endearing. I felt safe with her immediately, and relieved that I had already found a friend and danced in this hornet's nest.

"It is good to see you again." I said, as she took me by the arm and we walked forward, our heads pressed together conspiratorially as she continued to speak, "I have missed you and as God be my witness, if it wasn't for Joan Champernowe and Mary Norris, I think I might have died of boredom. The Queen has become much more melancholy of

late, since you know..." she had trailed off, looking at me earnestly and nodding her head as if to emphasise the sensitive, but obvious, nature for the Queen's discomfiture. Then she whispered close to my ear, "...since the King told her he wants to annul their marriage. There has been little merrymaking and the mood among the ladies is quite subdued. Unfortunately," at this point she sighed, "we see very few of the young gentlemen of the court, as they no longer seem as eager to pay their respects to the Queen. I'm afraid all of us maids of honour are suffering. Today is unusual though." She motioned to the throng of people around us. "Methinks that word has spread of your arrival and people have come as much to see you as the Queen!"

As we made our way toward the centre of the room, Nan paused, leaning in even closer, she asked "Is it true about the King... and you? There are rumours that the King is in love with you... that you are his mistress." I smiled. How people always thought the worst of human behaviour.

Henry may well have been in love with me, but I was never the King's mistress; at least not until much, much later. Whereas I was angry with the cold self-interest of my uncle when he had asked me a similar question just the evening before, Nan's soft, wide-eyed gullibility warmed my heart and it was easy to forgive her human fallibility.

"You must not believe everything you hear... It is true though that His Grace is paying me a certain degree of attention." I was determined that I would take every opportunity to defend Anne's virginity and virtue. "But I am a maid who is as untouched by man as the day I was born and, until I am married, I intend to remain in that happy state." Nan seemed satisfied with my answer and she moved on, changing the subject.

"You must announce yourself to the Queen." She smiled at me indicating that I should step forward towards the raised dais and present myself to Katherine. I could not put off what I had been dreading any longer, and so once again, I

mustered my courage and made my way through the crowd toward the Queen. As I emerged into the space in front of the dais, Katherine noticed me approaching. She broke off her conversation with one of her ladies, who was standing just behind her right shoulder. She sat back imperiously in her chair, her left arm resting on the arm of her throne, the other arm bent up, her right index finger thoughtfully stroking the underside of her chin. She eyed me warily for the longest time.

God, how I remember my first sight of the woman who I came to loathe for her self righteous obstinacy! Even seated, I could see that Katherine was of middling stature, a little shorter than me. Clearly well into middle age and affected deeply by her many miscarriages and births, her figure was already stocky and rather matronly. Her round face and thickset neck had long since hidden any definition of the bone structure that lay beneath.

I noticed that her nose was small and pert, even slightly

upturned; her lips plump and red, set against a surprisingly ruddy complexion, whilst her face was framed by a striking black English hood which had been trimmed with pearls. Katherine's rich gown was made of black silk, the square cut neck-line adorned with elaborate silver embroidery, whilst her voluminous, ermine lined sleeves were turned back to reveal a second, lower sleeve; this, in turn, was slashed to show the snow white linen "puffs" of fabric that mimicked the smock sleeve worn next to the skin. Finally, her regal status was emphasised by a dazzling array of rings which adorned her small and plump hands. About her neck was hung a thick gold chain, encrusted with diamonds and garnets, set off by yet more pearls.

Standing before Katherine, as manners dictated, I sank into a deep curtsy, casting my eyes deferentially to the ground. I remained there until she spoke.

"Please raise yourself, Mistress Anne." As I pulled myself up to my full height, I could not help but notice how I had

drawn my spine up straight and tall, my chin lifted high and proud. There we were; the Queen and her nemesis, facing each other for the first time since Henry's declaration that he would seek an annulment from his wife. Of course, she held me entirely responsible. For moments that seemed to stretch into minutes, a profound silence filled the room. Clearly Nan's suspicions were correct. Rumours around what was fast becoming known as "The King's Great Matter" were spreading like wildfire about the court and I could see that Henry and my father's attempts to keep my name at a discreet distance had not been being entirely successful. It was as if half the court had arrived to see this encounter, and I knew that the Queen was being studied as intently as I by the courtiers. Nobody dared even breathe; how would Katherine react toward me was the question on everybody's lips?

It was the Queen, who by her right and rank, spoke first. Her voice strangely low, almost gruff, like her daughter's

would become; her words were laced with a thick, Spanish accent. She spoke to me in quiet tones, and although outwardly courteous enough, I sensed those words were laced with contempt.

"I hear say that you have returned to court for a period of time, Madame. You are most welcome." Her brevity fulfilled court etiquette, yet made it plain that there was little else she wished to say to me. She nodded her head, indicating that our brief audience was concluded. One of her ladies with a dark, swarthy complexion and mature appearance indicated that I should make my way into the Privy Chamber to join the rest of the Queen's maids of honour. I assumed that she was one of Katherine's original ladies, who accompanied her from Spain when she came to England to marry Henry's fated elder brother. In time, I would know her as Maria de Salinas, Lady Willoughby. I curtsied once more, and then with Nan, we slipped into the Queen's Privy Chamber, beyond the prying eyes of all and sundry. I had done it, and I assumed that the worst was

surely over.



I was wrong, of course. I failed to appreciate how the prying eyes of a thousand lords and ladies could not be worse than the venomous and accusatory stares and cutting remarks which would be levelled at me by Katherine in the privacy of her own chambers. In public, of course, she was always the gracious Queen, treating me cordially and with all due respect. Yet in private, with only her closest and most loyal ladies attending, she took every opportunity to make snide innuendos that questioned my integrity and morality. To make matters worse, many of Katherine's ladies followed her example, as they shunned my company with an air of disdainful contempt. However, my real friends at court very quickly showed their true colours. They formed a tight little band about me, as if to try and protect me from the worst of the salacious court gossip.

It was the adversity of this unpleasantness which brought us so closely together in the final few months of 1527; myself, Nan Gainsford, Mary Norris and Joan Champernowe. The ties we forged then lasted for the rest of our days together – to be separated only by death.

I would quickly understand the nature of the Queen's Privy Chamber and the role that I was to fulfil. Like the rest of my friends, I was there as a maid of honour; an unmarried, young girl in the service of the Queen. Our duty was primarily to accompany the Queen everywhere she went and provide her with service and companionship; to dance, make music, play cards and to be her entertainment. However, unlike the ladies of the bedchamber – who were, by and large, married women and close personal friends of the Queen – we were rarely called upon to attend Katherine with her most personal tasks. In truth, I was glad of it, and spent as little time as possible in the Queen's company. Thankfully for me, Katherine had long ago given up any

idea of going hunting or hawking with the King. Along with dining with Henry at the end of the day, these two pursuits proved to be my sanctuary in the weeks ahead; the times when I could escape the confines of the Queen's suffocating malice towards me and enjoy endless hours of laughter, adoration and exhilaration. On reflection, these times formed the happiest days of my life; it was a time when I was the irrefutable centre of Henry's world and could do no wrong, and yet I was not overtly powerful enough to garner the deadly jealousy of my enemies.

My days soon settled into a familiar routine. I would rise and take breakfast at sunrise, usually around 5.30am in the summer, later in the winter when the days were shorter. Having dressed, I would make my way to the Queen's Privy Chambers, where she would habitually rise early to hear mass in her Privy Closet. We would then wait upon the Queen while she broke her fast, before accompanying her to hear mass yet again, later in the

morning. Usually, there was a little time afterward for taking light exercise, either walking in the Long Gallery or if it was fine, in the garden. Finally, we would return for lunch, or as they called it then, dinner, about midday.

While we were at Beaulieu the weather was foul – with unseasonable and unrelenting rain and gusty winds. As a result, we were all kept inside for many days at a time. As Katherine's ladies, we spent hours sitting together embroidering shirts, bed hangings or seat covers, often accompanied by gentle, sweet music or the sound of one of the Queen's ladies reading Christian or classical texts, romantic poetry or other ancient stories of chivalry.

Anne was clearly well educated. She sang with a sweet and clear, soprano voice, which I noticed caused a hush to descend on any audience. Fascinated, I remembered well in my 21st century life reading of Anne's fine and accomplished singing voice, which was described as having the capacity to 'make wolves and bears attentive'. I never believed that I

would have the privilege of hearing that sweet voice for myself, and watch others become enthralled by her melodic tones. Her time at the cultured French court had brought about mastery of other courtly pursuits too. I marvelled at her long and delicate fingers, which moved equally nimbly across the keys of a virginal or strings of the lute or rebec; or which worked delicate embroidery with the greatest precision and accuracy. Every day, Anne guided and educated me in the noble ways of 16th century court life, and every day I felt a growing and more intimate connection with the essence of the woman whose life I was living.

In the late afternoon, after attending Mass for a third time, the maids of honour would take turns to return to our chambers, relishing the chance to spend a little time in our own company. Several musical instruments came with me from Hever, including a flute, virginals and a clavichord, which was prettily decorated with green ribbons. When I first came across these instruments at Hever, I waited until I

was alone, initially approaching each one with a great deal of trepidation. I knew that Anne was an accomplished musician, yet I could not say the same for myself in my modern day life; it had been a long-standing regret that I had never even mastered the ability to read music.

Yet one by one, as I picked up each instrument, my hands took on a life of their own as they moved nimbly and swiftly as I played each one with an accomplished mastery; I was utterly overjoyed by the sweet melodies which emanated from them. It was becoming clearer to me that the ability to free my mind completely, becoming poised in the stillness of the moment, afforded Anne the space to express her creativity and flare. This unleashed unbounded joy and rapture as it stirred within me something profoundly beautiful that longed to be set free in the world.

I enjoyed this time to myself - most often reading, writing poetry, sometimes I even found myself effortlessly setting these poems to music. On many occasions, having

completed a piece of work, I would set it down in front of me and find myself more than a little awed by Anne's considerable talent. This talent, of course, paid homage to probably the finest Renaissance education available to a young lady of the day; a privilege that Anne's parents ensured had been made available to her, particularly as a result of her time spent in the sophisticated Hapsburg and French courts. In those moments of quiet reflection, I felt deeply saddened that all these works would eventually be lost to time, and that my own generation would never truly understand her gift, nor hear the thoughts that moved her heart.

However, on days when the weather was fine, I was often summoned by the King, whilst I was still abed, to join him and his hunting party for the day. On such days, I felt the exhilaration of freedom in the knowledge that Henry and I would run free together, with only a small handful of the King's most trusted friends and advisers to

accompany us. Furthermore, many of those men were beginning to show themselves as my friends and supporters. On such a day, we would take breakfast then leave the palace after Matins - the first mass of the day. Sometimes, I rode behind Henry on his own mount using a black velvet pillion saddle, with my arms wrapped tightly around his waist; I always adored pressing my cheek against his back as we rode along. I remember the smell of him, which I always found entirely agreeable. When I asked him what the scent was, Henry confided that he mixed his own of musk, ambergris, sugar and rosewater. This signature scent mixed with the warmth of Henry's skin, always stirred within me a deep and primitive passion and a longing to make love to him. When this happened, Henry would often tease me. He knew that I was a sensual being and that the scent of him aroused me. As we rode along and out of earshot of the others, he would speak to me over his shoulder and tell me how the pressure of my body against his was making him hard. Then we would giggle a lot, like

two lovesick teenagers. That's how it was then, in those early days; a carefree and joyous romance, so full of hope.



I look out of my prison window and close my eyes briefly; I remember what it was like to be so close to him, but that was long ago, another lifetime.

Returning mid-afternoon or sometimes after dark, caked in filth and splattered with mud, I would bathe and rest before dressing exquisitely for dinner; for here I could shine without being watched by reproachful eyes. With the gifts that Henry now showered on me daily, there was always something new to wear, and I constantly experimented with my appearance. Much to my amusement, it was noted by one courtier that Anne was 'always changing something in her appearance daily', which was seen by Anne's contemporaries as a natural flare for elegance and dress. In truth, I think much of this was my early ignorance of the

‘proper’ way to wear a sleeve, or a hood, or a piece of jewellery. I would often make suggestions to Bess, who with a raised eyebrow would obediently follow my somewhat unusual instructions, so that my ‘mistakes’ and naïveté were, in fact, seen as genius and copied by a whole court!

In the evening, most of Katherine’s ladies dined with the Queen alone. I thought that Henry would take dinner with Katherine. However, in his own words to me, he had long since given up her "bed and board" and with my return to court, he jealously guarded the time that we were able to spend together. Therefore, on most evenings, I was invited by the King to join him in his privy chambers to dine. For the sake of propriety, we never dined alone. Most often the King’s dinner guests would number six or seven, including my Uncle Norfolk, the Duke of Suffolk, my father, brother and the Marquis of Exeter. Occasionally, my mother would join us. However, I knew she felt uncomfortable in

the King's presence and preferred most often to keep to her own chambers. In such instances, either my sister-in law, Jane, or one of my friends would step in and act as chaperone.

With the inclement weather, there was much pent-up energy, not only in the King but also in the young gentlemen at court. So on most evenings, after we dined and tables cleared away, the King and the rest of our little party would join the wider court in the King's Presence Chamber where we would gather for music and dancing, laughter and storytelling, as we whiled away those summer evenings. I adored dancing with the King; despite his growing bulk, he was still nimble and agile in those days, yet strong; a charismatic King who dominated the court with his sheer magnetic personality. He could not take his eyes from me, nor in truth, I from him. I was his Venus; his night and day, his north and south, and whilst the court orbited the King, Henry's sun was Anne Boleyn.

I tried hard to keep my sense of self, the ordinary 21st century Anne; yet basking in the glow of Henry's love and passion for me, I confess that with every passing day, my reality was becoming my dream and my dream was becoming my reality. For many at court, I was still a curiosity, the King's latest pastime. The great lords of the Privy Chamber, such as Suffolk and Exeter tolerated my presence well enough, yet I sensed that they paid me little real attention. In their minds, Henry's interest would wane soon enough, as it always did. Of course, their mistake was to assume that I had already slept the King and sacrificed my virginity for an hour of glory and triumph. Like most people in those early days, these great men profoundly underestimated the strength and character of the woman that was Anne Boleyn.

Chapter Nine

The Palace of Beaulieu

August 18, 1527

On that Sunday afternoon, I returned from the Queen's Privy Chambers to find my father in the company of The Dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk – two of the leading nobles in the land. They were all seated around the large oak dining table in the centre of our apartment's main reception room. As I entered, the conversation stopped and all three men turned to look at me. My father spoke first.

"Anne, we have been waiting for you." I curtsied briefly as courtesy dictated, but said nothing and waited for my father to continue. "Come and sit with us, Anne" he said pointing to an empty chair next to him. I was immensely curious, but a little disturbed, by the gathering of this unholy trio that did not make for natural

bedfellows. I was seated opposite the two Dukes; smoothing out my skirts, and turning to look quizzically at my father, I indicated that I was ready to listen. However, it was not my father who spoke next, but the man sitting directly opposite me, Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk.

By now I had spent a good deal of time in the Duke's company, as we had dined together and hunted on many occasions with the King. As I listened to him, I had a chance to sit back and appraise this rather imposing character. Charles Brandon was then probably in his mid- forties. Like most people who know anything of the Tudor era, I knew a good deal about Charles Brandon. Raised from relatively humble origins, he was placed as a boy to be one of Henry's childhood companions. From that time, there had grown a deep and lasting friendship between the two men; indeed, Charles would be one of the few pre-eminent noblemen and courtiers of Henry's court who would live to die a natural death and still be in the good graces of

the King. I remembered, too, how this had all nearly come to a very sticky end when he married – without the King's permission – Henry's younger, and by all accounts, very beautiful sister, who had just become the Dowager Queen of France. It was only on the intervention of Cardinal Wolsey – and also I suspected Henry's long and deep affection for his sister – that the couple survived Henry's wrath. For a period of time, they lived in quiet estate in the countryside and had to pay enormous fines to the King on account of their serious transgression. Yet Henry forgave him, and Charles now held one of the few Dukedoms in the land, as well as many key positions as part of the King's household and government.

Charles would marry four times and must have known many women, and taken many mistresses, in his time. In my modern life, I knew many such men, and so his rakish charm was familiar to me. For Charles Brandon was a charmer, there was no doubt about that. I had often seen

many ladies swoon in his presence, despite the fact that he was married to the King's sister. When he spoke, I had to admit, it was easy to lose yourself in his voice which was smooth and velvety; always unruffled, he was a man who could deliver the deadliest of messages as if they were words of love. He was also unnervingly like the King; tall, well built with broad shoulders, and like Henry had a widening girth although his height meant that he too carried it well; in fact in many ways, he was all the more imposing for it. Unlike Henry though, Charles Brandon had dark brown hair which was beginning to be flecked through with grey. His hair was cut short and his moustache and beard, trimmed close to his face and chin. The Duke had strong facial features; his nose long, although somewhat broad and slightly flattened across the bridge; his eyes were large, dark brown and framed by long, dark and generous eyelashes. Despite his advancing years, I found his complexion to be rather youthful, as if he were younger than his years.

In the time that I had spent with his Grace, I was surprised to find that I enjoyed his company. Perhaps it was Charles' chameleon like ability to be anything that the King needed of him, but he seemed to enjoy my company in return. Charles' courage was renowned and perhaps there was a mutual, but unspoken, respect between us; we were like stags circling each other, each one recognising the steely resolve of the other, eyeing up the strength of the competition, neither one prepared to underestimate their opponent. However, I always recognised a subtle undercurrent of tension which flowed within our relationship during those early days; I could not forget that one day this man would plot against Anne.

Charles spoke. "Mistress Anne, your father, uncle and I have been discussing a rather sensitive matter relating to the Lord Cardinal." "Wolsey?" I said quizzically.

"Yes, His Grace, Cardinal Wolsey. As you well know, it was he who was responsible for your father losing two important

positions in the King's household some years ago. It is also common knowledge that it was Wolsey who intervened in your betrothal to Lord Henry Percy. I understand that this caused you much grievance." From my reading of history, I was well aware of how Anne's earlier romance to Henry Percy had been crushed as a direct result of the Cardinal's interference. Many had since speculated that this was on the orders of Henry himself, having already set his own eyes upon Anne Boleyn. However, the messenger had been Wolsey, and it was Wolsey who bore the brunt of Anne's anger. It was well recorded in the annals of time that as a result of his tussle with the King's first minister, Anne made it clear that if it were ever in her power to seek retribution upon the Cardinal, she would most gladly do it. Bearing all this in mind, I replied,

"You are correct, Your Grace." Although each day I felt more comfortable in that world, and more attuned with Anne, I intuitively sensed that this was a dangerous

conversation. So I held back, preferring to listen. In my silence, My Lord Suffolk forged on,

"Wolsey is naught but a butcher's son who has risen way beyond his station. His pomposity and grandeur is irksome."

I couldn't help but see the irony in just how far the Duke of Suffolk had risen above his own relatively modest beginnings. Uncharacteristically though, Anne held her tongue and I allowed the Duke to continue. "Your father has become aware that some of the Cardinal's, shall we say... financial affairs, suggest that he is lining his own pockets when he should be filling up the King's coffers. We," Suffolk indicated to my father and uncle, "believe that there may be an opportunity to get rid of the Cardinal once and for all." There was silence and then my uncle Norfolk continued.

"However, perhaps the time is not yet quite right. The Cardinal still holds considerable sway with the King's Grace and we must not act prematurely. There is much at stake. It

is clear to all of us here that you, Anne, are ever closer to the King's person. He listens to you more and more and we have no doubt that in time, of all of us here, you will be the best placed to turn the King's mind against him."

I remained still in my chair, looking steadfastly between each of the gentlemen who were seated around me. I understood clearly enough what they were asking of me; they wished to use me as their instrument to destroy the hated Wolsey. In that moment, I realised that Anne Boleyn had just crossed another threshold. She went from being an insignificant pastime of the King, to an ever more influential figure in the deadly game of court faction. I saw again, even from my own father, that my wishes, desires and emotions, were irrelevant. All that mattered to these noblemen was the strength of my relationship to the King and how they might leverage it for their own good. Deep within me, I sensed Anne's resentment of the Cardinal, and it would have been foolish of me to reject the support of

those powerful men; yet I wished to play a more measured game.

What they did not see – nor did they care about – was that I was a young woman in love with her Lord, and was trapped in an insufferable three-way relationship with Katherine. Every day it was becoming more and more arduous to hold my tongue at Katherine's snide remarks and derisory looks; more and more, all I longed for was for Henry and I to be free to be together. It felt impossible that he could ever turn against me, as I knew with every fibre of my being how much he loved me. So foolishly and blindly, I wanted to push on and find a way for us to be rid of her. Looking round the table, I sensed that perhaps there was still nobody better placed to bring about what I longed for than Wolsey, with all his international and diplomatic connections and experience. I decided to play their game, but I would play it my way. Anne was a shrewd operator and I felt her guiding hand as I replied,

"Father, Your Graces. I see the truth in your words and I see that we shall all be better off without the Cardinal. However, I also agree that the time is not yet right. The King still speaks highly of his minister and there is much yet to be done in the pursuit of his annulment." I paused, and then with all solemnity, fixed them squarely with my gaze and said, "I swear to you my Lords that in your support for me, I pledge my alliance to this cause. Yet you must trust me to know which way the wind blows and to act accordingly in our best interests." I nodded ever so briefly, as if to underline the conclusion to my case. I waited with bated breath, wondering if I had said the right thing. There was a collective sigh of relief around the room and smiles broke out amongst the gentlemen around the table; a rare thing indeed with my Uncle Norfolk. My father leant over and planted a gentle kiss on my cheek. He was clearly pleased with my performance. That was the day that the wolves agreed to bring down Wolsey. It was a monumental day for Anne Boleyn too; I knew that she was now centre

stage in the cut-throat world of court faction and politics.



The court remained at Beaulieu until mid-August when, according to plan, our eight hundred strong retinue packed our effects and set off towards Richmond Palace, another one of Henry's principal houses, nestled deep within the Thames Valley. It was a sight to behold; a procession consisting of hundreds of carts, horses and litters winding its way snakelike through country lanes that had been made almost impassable by the persistent rain, which had blighted the last few weeks. Like many of the ladies, in order to avoid the worst of the weather, I took refuge in a litter along with my new-found friends, Nan Gainsford and Mary Norris. I peered out the window, watching the grey and leaden skies on the horizon; sheets of rain blowing across the distant valleys and hills. Many of the fields about us were waterlogged, and it was clear that the crops

were failing and the harvest would be pitiful. I reflected on just how hopeless this situation must be for the average country peasant. In my modern day life, we lived in a world of plenty, never having to worry from where the next meal would come. But there were no supermarkets here, no international aid; without the harvest, the harsh reality was that people would starve to death. I felt truly humbled and extremely grateful for all the abundance I experienced in my life. I also prayed that day for all those who would suffer during the coming winter.

Such sobering thoughts, along with the dark and ominous weather, left me feeling rather downcast and gloomy. I remember that day, having a deep sense of my own vulnerability in this savage world and the grim inevitability which arose from knowing Anne's fate. Feelings that I had held in check, and pushed aside, as I basked in Henry's sweet love for me, now engulfed me with a vengeance. Wave after wave of despair crashed over me; so by the time

that the court arrived at Havering, one of the King's lesser houses in the Essex countryside, all I wanted to do was find a quiet space to be alone. This was easier said than done; because of the difficult travelling conditions, we had made slow progress, and the King decided to spend the night at this modest manor house en route to Richmond Palace. Accommodation at Havering was limited, and much of the court had to be housed in nearby houses, inns or tents, which were pitched up in the sodden parkland surrounding the property. We were luckier than most, riding high in the King's favour, our family was accommodated comfortably enough.

I spent the rest of the day brooding in my chamber, and when the King's messenger arrived inviting me to dine with him, on this occasion I respectfully declined; begging his Majesty's pardon and excusing myself on the grounds of illness. I wanted nothing more than some time and space to myself. It was now a rare thing, and so at odds with my 21st century life. In my imposed solitude, for the first time in

several weeks I found myself entirely lost in my thoughts of home and of Daniel. I reflected on just how much I had changed over the past few weeks.

I was beginning to lose myself in Anne, no longer so ready to see myself in her shoes, but rather that I *was* in fact becoming the woman who had always been my heroine. I remember thinking that if I were to return to the 21st century, would I remember this? I presumed I would, for I could remember my modern day life - although increasingly it was taking on an ethereal and rather dreamlike quality. I felt scared that day as I realised that I was no longer quite so sure what 'reality' really was anymore. I realised too that as Anne, I was in love with Henry – ever more each day. If I were re-united with Daniel, would I feel the same for him? Would I still love him? So many questions whirled through my mind. And it was with these troubled thoughts that I finally slipped into an exhausted slumber.



The King was gravely concerned by my message of the night before, and shortly after breakfast, I was summoned to his Privy Chambers. Henry was waiting for me alone in his private study and when I entered, he rushed over, taking me first in his arms, his face full of worry and concern for my well-being.

"Anne, sweetheart, are you all right? I sent my messenger back to enquire of the nature of your indisposition, but your lady mother said that you had already taken to your bed. I could not sleep for concern that you may have caught a serious chill on the journey yesterday." I stood close to Henry and he cupped my face between his strong hands. He searched my eyes lovingly, as he gently stroked the soft skin of my cheek with his thumb. I felt a little ashamed and embarrassed for causing Henry such concern over something that in the light of day – and thank God it had been a beautiful, warm summer's morning – seemed so self-

indulgent.

"I beg your Majesty's most humble pardon," I said with my eyes downcast. "I fear that the journey took its toll on me, but I am much refreshed now and completely well." I looked up and met Henry's gaze. "I am indeed sorry if I caused you worry, Henry." The King did not answer but leaned forward and kissed me tenderly on the lips. I think in his panic to assure himself that all was well, he had entirely forgotten all sense of propriety and for the first time in several weeks, we found ourselves entirely alone. Suddenly, his gentle kisses became more passionate, insistent and searching. In Henry's arms, I always found that all my cares and anxieties melted away, all sense of danger dissipated and I gladly dissolved into his embrace, returning his kisses with equal ardour. Clearly, the need for us to show public restraint over the previous weeks and months had demanded much of both of us; the energy that we spent managing our emotions and desires burst forth in an uncontrollable torrent

of passion.

Henry suddenly swung me about and pushed me backwards against his desk, which was placed in the centre of the room. Our passion escalated quickly, as we both gasped for air; the searching intimacy of our touch like oxygen to two bodies starved of sexual contact. He was a man unleashed as he covered my neck and breasts with savage kisses, as if he wished to devour me. Pushing me backwards, I reached out, scratching at the table for support; in the process, I heard objects sent flying in all directions, casualties of our intense physical drama.

My lover became wedged between my legs, and I found myself drawing him in to me, gripping him with my thighs. Like a man possessed, he tore at my bodice, as if intent on tearing it from me. Of course, that was impossible; the layers were far too thick and too tightly laced about my body. However, the other hand was free to find its way beneath my skirts, despite the many layers. We were almost

entirely lost and approaching the point of no return, when I suddenly saw the faces of my father and my uncle Norfolk before my eyes. It immediately jolted me back to reality. In truth, I wanted nothing more than for Henry to plunge himself inside me. However, with every ounce of self restraint that I was able to muster, I suddenly put one hand against his chest, holding him back and drawing away from his lips, I found myself gasping,

"No, Henry, no! We can't... not now... not like this! It was enough to break the spell and Henry's body, so taut and wound up like a coiled spring only a moment before, suddenly collapsed and went limp above me. We both rested for a moment in silence, breathless and frustrated; our lust remaining unfulfilled. After a little while, and with what seemed like a heavy heart, the King said,

"You are right, my love. I must respect your maidenhead until we are married." I was not prepared for this moment, but I knew that from a man like Henry, this show of restraint

was entirely uncommon and unfamiliar to him. I also knew that inadvertently, I had just raised the stakes another notch in terms of the expectations and intensity that existed in the tempestuous relationship between these two, passionate lovers.



Thankfully, our second day of travelling was much improved. We set out from Havering on a bright sunny, warm morning and although the roads remained difficult, our collective spirits were high and our train made faster progress toward the city. We were all greatly relieved to reach London, where the retinue transferred to barges that were to take us gracefully up river towards the Palace of Richmond.

As one of the Queen's maids of honour, I travelled in Katherine's Royal barge. In my modern day life, I have often

travelled on pleasure boats up and down the Thames. Yet all of these paled in comparison to the Royal barges of both the King and Queen; they were mini palaces in their own right, carved with elaborate heraldic devices, emblazoned with gold and silver and crowned magnificently with a multitude of colourful banners and regalia associated with the Royal House of Tudor. I would come to know this form of travel intimately and eventually Katherine's barge would become my own. Yet for now, I marvelled at the prospect, still in raptures at the wonder and delights of my new home. As I was helped onto the boat to take my place in attendance on the Queen, I appreciated the beauty of the elaborate wainscoted panelling about the boat, and the sumptuous fabrics covering the multitude of cushions, which were provided for our every comfort.

Taking my seat, I looked along the length of the vessel, admiring the fine appearance of the liveried oarsmen, who were already seated in anticipation of our arrival. They

were a splendid sight in their red and gold uniforms, oars raised, awaiting the signal for us to depart. We took our seats alongside the Queen under a canopy hung with cloth of gold and rich purple velvet. To pass the time, a young man on a lute serenaded us with melodies that were now familiar to me; whilst the sweet smell of burning herbs filled my nostrils, displacing the rather unpleasant smell of the river water, which floated up around us. I was thrilled at the prospect of this journey. I had already made some acquaintance with the Tudor city of London as I passed through it with my mother and brother on the way to Beaulieu. Yet there was something always exciting about seeing London from the very heart; from the enduring body of water that had always been a key trade route, and which originally ensured that London would become England's capital.

As we moved away from the pier, the river breeze brushed gently against my cheeks, and I soon fell into the rhythm of

the boat; the oarsmen moving as one, cutting effortlessly through the choppy tidal water. In my excitement, I had to constantly fight the urge to turn to my companions and ask the myriad of questions that were bubbling up about the many beautiful sites that unfolded before me. However, what did strike me the most that day, was how busy the river was. In 21st century London, it was a common sight to see tourist cruisers making their way up and down the estuary. But today the river was awash with a flotilla of vessels, from large sailing vessels that travelled to foreign shores, to the smaller wherrys for hire that transported messengers, nobles and rich merchants up and down the Thames.

Soon we were approaching London Bridge, but not the London Bridge that I knew in my modern life; it was the old London Bridge; a series of sturdy stone arches supported on large stone piers, rising up out of the water, clad in protective timber starlings. The bridge itself was a main thoroughfare, lined on each side with timber-framed,

three and four-storey houses. There were many shouts and cries that floated down from above us, as we came close. Having already crossed the bridge on the way to Beaulieu, I knew that the barrage of voices were coming from merchants' houses and shops, which lined the medieval street above. However, not all the buildings were made of timber. There were two or three stone buildings; one had a defensive drawbridge which dominated one end of the bridge. When I looked up at it, I nearly gasped aloud. For the first time, I noticed the grisly sight of the rotting remains of two traitors' heads, both of which were stuck up on poles placed above the ramparts of the Gatehouse. I watched the ravens circling around them, occasionally landing to peck at the putrefying flesh and suddenly, I had the urge to vomit. Turning my head away, I breathed deeply, just managing to hold myself together. Thankfully, nobody seemed to notice my distress as there was much chatter and laughter on board the barge. I was truly glad to have the memory of that bloody sight, and the

nausea which accompanied it, behind me, soon replaced by the delight of seeing so many beautiful houses and palaces abutting the banks of the river.

As we continued to move upstream and away from the city, it was incredible to see the plethora of ornate gardens, orchards and open green spaces along the riverbank, all of which served the many comely riverside properties of the well-to-do of this vibrant city. By the time we approached Richmond, we were virtually in open countryside, with only small clusters of dwellings and the odd parish church set amongst the patchwork of fields, which stretched as far as the eye could see. As we eventually navigated our final bend in the Thames, Henry's great Palace of Richmond came into view. Having seen the building hundreds of times, the Queen and her ladies continued their chatter and paid little attention to the palace as we approached it. However, for someone like myself, with a passionate love of Tudor architecture, so saddened by the loss of

almost all of Henry's palaces in the 21st century, the sight of Richmond was truly like a fairytale.

Ahead a grand, stone palace soared up from the western bank of the Thames; a myriad of square and octagonal towers capped with turrets, domes and flags which fluttered in the gentle summer's breeze. A multitudinous array of mullioned windows glistened in the afternoon sunlight, and the royal apartments, which faced north, commanded the most magnificent views of the river and the countryside beyond. As we drew closer, I could see the Great Hall set towards the back of the palace precinct, whilst abutting the main buildings were a series of smaller, red-brick service buildings, which maintained the efficient functioning of the royal residence.

The King was disembarking ahead, accompanied by a number of men of the Privy Chamber and other notable lords and councillors. Soon our barge drew level with the Watergate. Once the Queen had set foot on dry land, all of

her ladies followed, as we made our way into the heart of the palace, passing up the staircase from the Watergate and into the central donjon, or tower. The Queen's apartments occupied the second floor, above those of the King's. Although I was becoming accustomed to the lavish and luxurious surroundings of Henry's royal palaces from my time at Beaulieu, Richmond – with its many turrets, domes and flags - was like something out of a fairy story. I fell in love with it instantly.

Before long, life resumed much as it had been before; periods of irritation and tedium waiting upon Katherine, far too protracted for my liking interspersed with the thrill of hunting, hawking, dining, dancing and gambling - for which I developed quite a taste. The ragged remains of that summer flitted away almost unannounced. By the beginning of September, autumn burst upon us with more rain and gusty winds. Then on 30th September, 1527, I finally met the man who Anne and her faction would later destroy.

Chapter Ten

The Palace of Richmond Archbishop of York, Cardinal Wolsey

September 30, 1527

On that fateful morning, I had woken excited to be having one of my rare days away from the drudgery of attending the Queen. Henry summoned me to meet him in his Privy Chambers; as usual on days like this, we were to meet shortly after the first mass of the day. I took my time to dress exquisitely for him, choosing to wear the gown of black damask and velvet that he had bought for me upon my arrival at Beaulieu. Bess expertly dressed me, my hair was swept up and braided as usual, before being dressed with an English hood that was elaborately set with pearls. I chose a necklace made of gold, its centrepiece wrought into a fashionable geometric design, and under that, hung a

large tear-drop pearl.

Now familiar with the layout of the palace, I easily made my way through its labyrinth of corridors and interconnecting rooms. I slipped unobtrusively through the outer public chambers of the King's apartments. However, this was becoming increasingly difficult, as rumours of the King's attentions toward me continued to grip the court. Then, as I approached the door to the King's privy apartments, I came face-to-face with a man whose countenance I could not fail to recognise as the King's first minister, Cardinal Wolsey.

Wolsey was standing close to the entrance to Henry's private suite of rooms, deep in discussion with a courtier, who I knew as Thomas Heanage, one of Wolsey's men. As I approached, Wolsey caught sight of me and turned to watch me with curiosity. The Cardinal's face remained impassive as he studied me; I suspected he was a little confused by the opulence of my attire, which had much changed, no

doubt, since he had last met Anne. I must admit that I was quite taken aback by Wolsey's appearance. I recalled well his portraits; a rather portly man dressed head to toe in scarlet red. But what I had not appreciated was just how overweight he was.

Of average height, Wolsey was huge; not even the generous folds of the Cardinal's silk robes could hide his rotund belly. I took in the detail of his large, round face; his most distinguishing feature being a pronounced dimpled chin which fell away into flabby jowls which seemed to take on a life of their own, wobbling when he talked or moved his head. His pasty-white complexion was exaggerated by the flushed red of his cheeks, shot through as they were with tiny broken capillaries. It was a sure sign that this man enjoyed the bounty of his position in life. I also knew from the King that Wolsey had been away on a diplomatic mission to France, ostensibly to sign a treaty of peace with the French. However, covertly the Cardinal had

also been instructed to seek out the support of the French King for an annulment of Henry's marriage to Katherine. Yet Henry also confided to me that he had not told his first minister the full intentions of his heart; I wondered whether the King had already begun, in some slight way, to question the loyalty of the Cardinal. I sensed that, uncharacteristically Wolsey – the great politician and master of court faction - had yet to fully appreciate Anne's ascendance at court and the King's personal motives behind his pursuit of an annulment suit.

As a matter of courtesy, which by now came naturally to me, I dipped into a deep curtsy, bowing my head toward the Cardinal as I said,

"Good morning, Your Grace." As much as I tried, there was not much warmth in my voice. Wolsey hesitated; I saw that despite his powerful intellect and usual vice-like grip on court politics, he remained somewhat bemused. Eventually

he spoke,

"Mistress Anne," he too inclined his head respectfully, "What pray, are you doing here outside the King's privy chambers?"

"I'm here to see the King, naturally." I heard the edge of irritation bubbling through my cool demeanour. The Cardinal studied me intently, as I watched him calculating the possible reasons for my presence. After some moments, his impassive expression broke into a knowing smile.

"Ah, I see... But I am surprised at you Mistress Boleyn; I thought you aimed much higher than to merely occupy the estate of the King's mistress." He spoke condescendingly to me as if I were some sort of filth that he had trodden on in the street. "I thought an intelligent woman such as yourself would learn from your sister's mistakes." I felt a

venomous anger well up inside me, both on my behalf and for my sister's honour. Yet, I had experienced Anne's anger enough times by then to know that despite her reputation of having a fiery temper, on occasion that same fire would cool me into an ice maiden capable of savage rhetoric. I took one step towards the Cardinal and in hushed, but fierce tone, I spoke, all the time not wavering from my eye contact with the King's first minister,

"My Lord Cardinal, if I remember rightly, if it were not for you and your heartless interference, I would soon be the Countess of Northumberland. Think not that I have forgotten – nor forgiven. As for your...assumption, let me give Your Grace a word of advice. You should perhaps be a little more circumspect – you know not to whom you speak."

The Cardinal suddenly flushed scarlet, matching the same colour as his robes. Involuntarily, I nearly laughed aloud, as I watched him struggle to find the words that would deal with my impudence; his jowls shaking with fury, Wolsey

finally found his composure.

"Dear lady, I think perhaps on the contrary, you forget to whom you speak." I shrugged; raising my eyebrow, a small smile of indifference tugged at the corner of my mouth. It was clear that this irritated the Cardinal even further, but before he had chance to go on, a gentleman approached us, calling out the Cardinal's name. Arriving breathless at our side, he ignored me and spoke directly to Wolsey,

"Your Grace, I have received a letter from the French ambassador which I think you might like to look at straightaway." The man presented the sealed letter, which the Cardinal duly took. Glancing at me, he seemed to be torn for a moment between continuing his rebuke of my impudence and the need to appraise the contents of the ambassador's missive. He decided that the letter presented him with a more important and pressing issue and nodded "Mistress Anne" he said curtly, before turning on his heels and hurrying off with his servant trotting dutifully behind

him.

Following my altercation with the Cardinal, I was led through a series of Henry's private rooms, eventually being shown into one of his most secret chambers, his private study. Only the most intimate of the King's courtiers had access to Henry in these most hallowed of rooms – those that lay beyond even the designated privy chamber suite. As I entered, I watched the King studying a series of official documents and manuscripts that lay spread out on the desk in front of him. A number of books also lay open and piled in random stacks; he was deeply engrossed in whatever he was studying, and failed to hear me enter the room. I stood silently for a moment and watched the man that I loved, unaware that he was being observed. Perhaps objectively he might not have been any longer called "the handsomest Prince in Christendom", but the love that I felt grow within me on a daily basis, let me see beyond his flaws. My heart softened and melted as I watched the tiny

furrow in his brow deepen with the intense concentration he brought to the work before him. With a quill in hand, he moved quickly across the parchment, adding annotations and his own personal thoughts in the margins; occasionally, he would draw a small hand with an extended finger – as I had seen him do many times before - indicating towards a particularly pertinent point within the text that he wished to highlight. I must have stood there for a minute or more, simply enjoying his presence. Finally, however, I broke the silence,

"Your Majesty." I said dipping into a deep and graceful curtsy. Henry looked up immediately and as I met his gaze, he broke into a broad smile, as he did every time I walked into a room.

"Ah! Good 'morrow sweetheart!" he said indicating that I should approach, " I wish to show you something." Henry reached out and put his arm around my waist, drawing me down to sit upon his lap, as he pointed to the papers in front

of him. "I want to show you that I work on the case of my annulment from Katherine every day." He gestured with an open hand across the parchments laid before us, as if giving evidence on his application to the cause. Tenderly, the King reached up and gently touched my chin, as he turned my face towards him. "I have never been more convinced that the case is a just and moral one, and that soon I will be free to make you my Queen." With that Henry drew me towards him, kissing me softly on the lips. I must have appeared distracted, as indeed I was; I was still ruminating on my first, rather unsettling meeting with the King's first minister. "What is it, my love? You do not seem happy. Do I not please you?" I noticed how Henry, so sure of himself in every way in his dealings with others, often faltered in the presence of Anne.

"Oh, Your Grace, it has naught to do with this. I am touched by your Majesty's constancy in your intentions toward me and the strength of your resolve. It is just that... well...

Wolsey is back. We came upon each other by chance just outside your Privy apartments and he was rude to me." Anger was building in my voice again, as I replayed the scene in my head. "How so, sweetheart?"

"He implied that I was your whore." I pulled myself away from the King, feeling ashamed and angry, I walked over to the fireplace; it had already been lit as, being mid-September, there was a distinct autumn chill in the air. "Your Grace... Henry... It is so unfair! I have maintained my honour and yet," I threw my arms open in despair, "everybody thinks the worst of me, regardless of what I say or do! I'm getting sick and tired of it! Do you not see how much it offends me?" I felt Anne's intemperance begin to take hold, when suddenly there was a knock at the door.

"Enter!" Henry spoke firmly. The door opened and in stepped George Cavendish, another one of Wolsey's men. I recognised Master Cavendish when I first met him at Beaulieu, some few weeks earlier. I remembered that he

would be one of the people to write an account of Anne Boleyn in his memoirs of Cardinal Wolsey; as a result, I always tried to be on my best behaviour around him. However, in spite of my good intentions, with anger simmering in my breast, I forgot myself entirely.

"Sire, His Grace, Cardinal Wolsey has returned from France and begs an audience with you." He cast a nervous glance in my direction, his speech faltering, clearly aware that his master would want to seek a private audience – and alone with the King. "May I tell the Cardinal where he may meet with Your Grace?" Before Henry had the chance to speak, my words burst forth – rashly and impudently - yet I could not stop myself. "Where else should the Cardinal come, except where the King is?" A moment's silence descended upon the room. I noticed that for a few seconds Henry appeared somewhat caught off guard. Master Cavendish shifted his weight nervously, until the King gave his command,

"Tell His Grace to come here forthwith. We are keen to hear his report." The lightness had gone out of Henry's voice, and I could not help but wonder whether I had chased it away or whether the King had already turned his serious attention to the results of Wolsey's mission to persuade the French King to support his annulment. With Henry's words, Master Cavendish bowed and left the room. I had expected the King to admonish me for speaking out of turn, but to my surprise, Henry simply moved closer toward me and drew me in to his warm embrace.

"Fret not, sweetheart. Let us hear what news of Francis and let us pray that the Cardinal has been successful in his mission." Within a few moments, there was another knock at the door. Henry moved away from me, and standing squarely behind his desk, he spoke once more,

"Enter." The door had opened and a rather sheepish looking Wolsey entered. I had no doubt that Master Cavendish had

alerted the Cardinal to my presence, and Wolsey's discomfiture was clear.

"Your Majesty," The Cardinal bowed toward the King, but his eyes kept glancing toward me, clearly unable to fathom the reason for my presence in this most intimate of meetings between the King and his first minister. I stood my ground, somewhat haughtily, I must confess. Raising myself to my full height, I fixed my stare upon the Cardinal and God forgive me, but I am sure that the faintest smile of satisfaction toyed lightly at the corner of my lips.

Somewhat hesitantly the Cardinal finally spoke, his hands clasped together before him in front of his oversized belly. "Your Grace, I... I have news of King Francis... perhaps... perhaps we may speak alone?"

Robustly and defiantly, as if defending my honour, the King replied curtly to his first Minister. "You may speak here - for whatever you have to say to Us can be said in front of Mistress Boleyn. We have a mutual interest in the

outcome of your parlance with King Francis." I saw the flicker of recognition and terror pass fleetingly across the Cardinal's face. I knew in that moment, he had for the first time realised that I was no passing fancy for Henry; that he, like many others, entirely underestimated me. Anne was the thunderstorm that appeared at the end of a long, hot sunny day, gathering from nowhere and sweeping the court up in a roar - just as Thomas Wyatt had predicted. I knew then that Wolsey had realised that things had become very serious for him – perhaps fatally so.



Wolsey now had the difficult task of breaking the news to Henry that although Francis extended deeply and sincerely his brotherly love toward the King, he could not, given the delicacy of the situation in Rome, publicly support Henry's case for an annulment. The King was furious and ranted about the treachery and disloyalty of his royal cousin.

Wolsey too had to endure a fair share of the brunt of Henry's anger, as the King upbraided his first minister for his diplomatic failure to convince Francis of the moral righteousness of his quest to be rid of Katherine. I was aware that Francis knew Anne personally from her time spent at the French court in the service of Mary Tudor and later, Queen Claude. I also remembered from history that Francis' reputation as a womaniser was notorious, and I had no doubt that he saw easily enough through Henry's charade; whilst he understood that the King's conscience may well be touched, Henry's desire to make Anne his wife and Queen was one of his main motivations for the annulment.

Like all of Henry's courtiers, the Cardinal absorbed the King's fury with downcast eyes and patient silence, eventually soothing the King with calm words of steadfast loyalty and assurances of a happy outcome. As I watched the scene impassively, inwardly I could feel Anne's frustration gently smouldering, her patience – my patience –

for this ever more intense *ménage à trois* between Henry, Katherine and myself becoming harder to bear with each passing day. Wolsey managed to sweeten this most bitter of pills by presenting Henry with a glittering array of precious gifts from his French royal 'cousin'.

First among these was confirmation of the French King's intention to sign a treaty of friendship and solidarity with the English against Charles V; to be sealed with a presentation of France's highest order of chivalry to the King, the *Ordre de Saint-Michel*. It became clear that over the next few weeks, the Cardinal would inveigle himself once again into the King's good graces by his impeccable execution of a number of staged pieces of court grandeur, which was to culminate in the investiture of the King in the Order in early November.

In anticipation of the many revels ahead, the court would once again be on the move. Some four weeks later, toward

the middle of October, the court set off toward Henry's favourite residence, one upon which he had lavished much attention and built a fabulous array of leisure facilities for his entertainment; a palace surrounded by the most bountiful of parklands, and nestled idyllically away from the city on the banks of the Thames; one that would provide the backdrop to some of the most momentous occasions in Anne's life. We were heading to the Palace of Placentia at Greenwich.

Chapter Eleven

The Palace of Placentia at Greenwich

November 10, 1527

We travelled to Greenwich in the same way that the court had made its journey to Richmond, along the Thames. The inclement weather we experienced that summer and autumn was comparatively mild, for the winter of 1527 – 28 was to be an exceptionally bitter one. For much of the season, parts of the Thames froze and became impassable by barge. I heard throughout those winter months that the supply of food – particularly flour – was becoming ever scarcer, and from time to time there were riots in the city of London. I found myself praying for those poor souls desperate for food and warmth in this harshest of English winters.

Such was the case, as I knelt in prayer on that foggy, and exceptionally chilly, November morning. The court was

abuzz with excitement, for that day marked the culmination of the festivities surrounding the King's investiture into the *Ordre de Saint-Michel*. The investiture itself would take place in the King's Presence Chamber later that morning. To celebrate the occasion, a joust was planned for the afternoon, followed by a grand banquet with music and dancing. For the first time, I was to witness the full coming together of the great lords and ladies of Henry's court, all eager to participate in the celebrations; to see and be seen and pay homage to their Lord. Greenwich Palace proved to be the most magnificent setting for the festivities which had been carefully planned by Cardinal Wolsey. Exulting the King's Majesty with ever grander celebrations since his return from France, my Lord Cardinal gradually reasserted his political dominance at court. Thomas Wolsey was, by then, fully aware of my ascendancy in the King's favour and, at least to my face, treated me with great deference and respect. Yet, as I was learning so often in this game of court politics and power plays, tensions simmered dangerously

beneath the surface. I suspected that the Lord Cardinal prayed fervently every day for my swift removal from the court and from Henry's affections. From my prior knowledge of history, I also knew that, in his heart, Wolsey would never truly support my relationship with the King. We both recognised that in the battle for the King's heart and mind there could only be one victor. Yet for the time being, I had to remind myself that His Grace remained one of the most useful men in England for assisting Henry in gaining his annulment from Katherine.

And so, that morning I knelt in prayer along with the rest of the royal household, the court having come together early in the day to celebrate mass in The Church of the Observant Friars at Greenwich. The King and Queen knelt side-by-side in front of the high altar, as the Dean of the Chapel Royal led prayers of thanksgiving. As I watched Henry and Katherine together, I felt a tightness take hold in my stomach. It was irksome enough to be in

Katherine's service, but to see the man that I loved at her side, showing her all due deference as his Queen, was difficult for me to tolerate. Knowing how much it upset me, Henry would take me in his arms, stroke my hair, and patiently explain the political necessity for him to be at his wife's side, and that she meant nothing to him. He would tell me how much he longed that it could be me, as it would in time, and that we must be patient. By and by, with his soothing words and sweet caresses, my irritation would be appeased, until I was faced with the reality that I was still "the other woman". I could not help but feel then that I was being put back in my gilded cage until it was convenient to let me out once more – and I railed against my confinement.

I reflected on the irony of the fact that I had so often felt this way in my modern day life with Daniel. When our time together was over – which always seems too short – he would return to his "real" life and his family and, once

again, I would be left alone to wait patiently. Oh! How I had become sick of waiting patiently! I often wondered if this was always to be my fate. I attempted to distract myself by glancing round the assembled congregation – the cream of England's aristocracy. By now, I had met, and become familiar with, many of the people who would play out the drama of Anne's life at court. It had taken only a few short weeks, but the Boleyn's stellar rise in the King's favour had become increasingly evident, and I thought of myself as the figurehead of an emerging court faction centered around our family; and, as was becoming increasingly evident to me, the reformed faith. Anne was ambitious and although my modern sensibilities often tried to temper this, her wilful courage and pride shone through as I learnt how easily she could make enemies. As I looked around, I saw many of those who would wish me removed, first among these was Katherine herself who utterly despised me; and by then, I confess that the feeling was entirely mutual. Influenced by her mother, it did not take long for the eleven-year-old

Princess Mary to turn against me. I glanced across the far side of the Chapel and saw the young girl in profile and deep in prayer.

Mary was a child of relatively small and petite stature. Quite a pretty little thing overall; she did however have a strong, square jaw line, a rather pronounced and delicate chin and her mother's small, slightly upturned nose. I had tried on several occasions to engage the child in polite conversation; enquiring after Her Grace's health and pleasure. I soon found that the Princess shared her mother's disdain for Anne whom she clearly saw as nothing more than a common whore and fledgling heretic. Of course, this did nothing to warm me toward her. It was clear that both Anne and Mary, sharing the same sense of pride and headstrong determination, were always going to be at loggerheads with one another.

Perhaps more gracious, but no less deadly, was the Duke of Suffolk, whose wife, the Dowager Queen of

France and the King's sister, also hated Anne Boleyn and was well known to have used opprobrious language in relation to the King's new paramour. Reinforcing this emerging faction were other lords, whose ancient lineages and religious inclinations lent themselves more naturally to favour the Queen; the Nevilles, the Courtenays, the Montagues, and the De La Poles, all who steadfastly began to nail their colours to the Aragonese mast and to show themselves as no friend of Anne's. At the same time, I knew that Anne had a truly magnetic personality and with her vivacious flare and seductive intelligence was also beginning to develop a network of friends and allies amongst existing members of the King's immediate entourage, as well as through family ties and her inclination towards the emerging reformed faith.

Outside Anne's immediate family was the Duke of Norfolk, who for the time being saw Anne's rise in the King's favour as advantageous for his family and for

himself. A number of the King's Gentleman of the Privy Chamber, and personal friends, were also emerging as supporters of the Boleyns. All of these men were present that day, and as I glanced over my shoulder, I could easily pick them out within the congregation; Thomas Wyatt, William Carey (my sister's husband), Sir Henry Norris, William Brereton, Sir Richard Page, and Anne's second cousin, Sir Francis Bryan. Then, of less importance politically, but of immense value to me, had been my fellow maids of honour, my friends who daily shared my troubles and my triumphs; Nan Gainsford, Joan Champernowe and Mary Norris, the wife of Sir Henry; by that time, I had worked out that Mary was also a cousin of Anne's, who had served with her in France, first as a maid of honour to Mary Tudor then latterly to Queen Claude.

With the service finally over, the King and Queen processed through the Chapel. Still somewhat vexed with the King – although Lord knows, it was not his fault – I kept my eyes downcast and avoided his stare. I knew that as he

walked by, Henry tried to catch my eye, yet I felt disinclined to reciprocate. Before long, the King's Gentleman of the Privy Chamber and Katherine's ladies-in-waiting also followed the King and Queen along a private gallery from the church back towards their separate privy chambers in the main part of the palace, there to prepare for the investiture ceremony which was to follow. Suddenly, still simmering with jealousy, I felt I might suffocate as I could not face seeing Katherine at Henry's side for one moment longer. As we approached a door leading off the gallery, which led back into the heart of the Palace, I was seized by an overwhelming desire to escape. I grabbed Nan's hand as she walked beside me; before she could say a word of protest, I pulled her through the doorway and into the passageway beyond, leaving the main party to continue along its way.

The release from the intense solemnity and stuffy court etiquette of the morning caused us both to collapse into a fit

of girlish giggles as we hurried along the corridor and away from the gallery. As crisp and cold as that frosty November morning was, I hankered to get some fresh air and absorb the tranquil peace of the palace gardens. Stopping briefly at my family's apartments, Bess helped both me and Nan into rich furs to protect us from the winter chill before we made our way outside.

Winter's icy grip had chased away the colourful mantle of the autumn. Yet the harsh frost brought its own pure, white beauty. Soon, I was walking arm-in-arm with my friend through the palace's privy gardens which were splendidly laid out in front of the Queen's lodgings. Nan and I ambled through those gardens, clutching our furs about us. We huddled together both for warmth, and so that we might share the latest court gossip without being overheard by those who might lurk unseen behind the tall yew hedges which divided the garden into a number of smaller, more intimate spaces.

I had spent a great deal of time with Nan since first arriving

in Anne's world, so I had come to know a considerable amount about her. Most importantly, I knew that she was a most loyal and dependable friend; someone I could count on, no matter what. Nan was a little older than me, in her early thirties at the time, although she was so fresh-faced it was easy to mistake her for a woman some ten years younger. Unusually, she remained unmarried and I often wondered why; a young and vibrant woman, full of *joie de vivre* with an easy-going and accepting nature. However, she was the target of one gentleman's affections; a Master George Zouche had taken a fancy to Nan earlier in the year. It was clear that my friend was entirely enamoured with her potential suitor, and much of our time together was spent deliciously dissecting his intentions and the courtly pursuit of his intended love. As we walked along, side-by-side, I drew a deep breath and felt the air's icy tentacles reach deep inside my chest, sweeping away the stale air of the Palace.

"Oh, it is so lovely to be outside on such a beautiful

morning!" I said taking another long and satisfied breath.

"Anne, you are wicked! You will get us into so much trouble, stealing away like that when we should be waiting upon the Queen," replied my friend. Yet as much as she scolded me, I knew that Nan shared my sense of mischief and was as glad as I to escape.

"Let us forget Katherine and our duties for now..." I turned to face Nan and with a twinkle in my eye, I continued, "and let us talk of more interesting things." "Such as?" Nan looked at me quizzically.

"Such as a certain Master Zouche?"

I raised my eyebrows and smiled at her, teasing my friend and causing a sudden flush of scarlet to race across her cheeks.

"Tell me, have you heard nought from him recently?"

"Well" Nan looked at me and smiled coyly, "as a matter of

fact, I have. He wrote a letter to me and told me that he was returning to court this very day for the King's investiture. Oh Anne! I am so excited! A woman of my age; I should know better and yet I feel like a young maiden in the first flush of youth."

"Do you love him, Nan?" I asked, searching her face, which was already lit up at the very thought of seeing her lover again. "I do believe that I am falling in love with him, yes."

"Then all is well. Why shouldn't you enjoy it? Falling in love is one of life's delicacies and should be enjoyed as such." Recalling what I knew from history; that Nan would live well into her nineties, I took her hand in mine, and smiled broadly as I said, "I predict that you will live a very long and happy life, dear friend. Live it well and perhaps you will remember me and our friendship in your old age." Nan stopped and turned to look at me.

"Why should you say such a thing like that? We will grow

old together; you and I, and we will always be friends."

Nan was one of life's eternal optimists. I said nothing more, for how could I possibly explain to her what the future had in store for Anne Boleyn. For a while more, we ambled our way through the garden, stopping occasionally to admire its naked beauty. Eventually we found ourselves at the centre of the garden; a circular space surrounded by tall, sculpted hedging. In the middle of the space was a stone fountain carved with heraldic beasts. The icy temperatures caused part of the water to freeze, creating an ice sculpture that cascaded down from the top of the fountain across its stony tiers. It was an unexpected sight of breath-taking beauty. The morning sunlight was breaking through the dawn's freezing fog and its rays – refracted through the icicles – caused the fountain to glisten as if studded with a myriad of precious jewels. It was as if a piece of art had been created just for us to delight and marvel in, and like appreciative patrons we stood awhile in silence, drinking in his beauty. Nan broke the silence first as we

circled around it.

“But what about you, Anne? You must have noticed that the whole court cannot take its eyes off you. The King seems enraptured, and I hearsay that if he gets his annulment of his marriage to Katherine, he intends to make you his Queen.” I glanced toward my friend, raising a quizzical eyebrow, I asked, “And where pray tell did you hear such gossip?” The tone of my voice was light and playful. Until this point I had kept my counsel, avoiding my friends’ repeated attempts to draw forth the truth from me. Yet, still somewhat irritated from watching Katherine and Henry together, I suddenly felt that perhaps the time was right to shake things up a little. I sensed Anne’s intrepid spirit urging me on to raise the stakes.

“Actually, I overheard the Queen herself talking to one of her ladies - Maria de Salinas. They were speaking in Spanish and I’m sure they didn’t think for a moment that I could understand them; but as you know my father was keen that

all his children should be well schooled. I confess, I cannot speak the language fluently but I know enough to have understood Her Grace to say that she believed that the King's true intention is to make you his Queen." Nan looked at me with a mixture of pride in her ability to have gleaned the gossip in the first place, and curiosity as to how I would answer. Fixing my stare straight ahead, I answered matter-of-factly,

"Yes, the King intends that we should marry and that I will be crowned Queen." Nan stopped dead in her tracks. I suddenly realised that she probably thought that Katherine had been over-exaggerating. Then in a deep curtsy she exclaimed,

"Your Majesty!" My brother had often teased me as such, yet this was the first time anybody other than him had addressed me as 'Majesty'. Whilst there was much lightness in our interaction, I could tell that Nan was filled with awe; for the first time, I felt a great weight of responsibility and

expectation bearing down upon me. It was not an entirely unpleasant experience; I knew even then that Anne was a willing apprentice to fate and destiny.

"Nan, you must be careful, for you know as well as I that to say such things are treason!" Nan had risen from her curtsy and retorted,

"It's not treason if it is the will of the King though, is it? Just think my friend, the Queen of all England!" At that moment, our conversation abruptly halted as we heard the sound of footsteps on the gravel pathway coming towards us. We turned our heads just in time to see a gentleman of the court emerge through an archway in the hedging. It was Nan's lover, George Zouche.

"Why, Master Zouche! This is indeed a pleasure." I proclaimed with a broad and mischievous smile. "Mistress Gainsford was just telling me of your imminent arrival at court." Playfully, I went on, "I trust, Master Zouche, that

you have come a-courting? I saw that Nan was blushing furiously, her head dipped coyly, praying, I suspect, that I would say little more.

"Mistress Boleyn, Mistress Gainsford." He bowed courteously to us both before going on, "Indeed, I have returned to court as soon as my business in the country would allow. I thought to come and find Mistress Gainsford at the earliest opportunity. One of Her Grace's ladies told me that you had both slipped away together, and I wondered if I might find you here." "Then it is only meant that I should leave the two of you to talk alone, for such sweet pastime, between two people in love, is precious indeed. Master Zouche! Nan!" I inclined my head to each of them politely before excusing myself and leaving the two lovers alone. Walking briskly away, I made my way back through the formal gardens towards the Palace. Passing under an old rose bower, I suddenly came face-to-face with my brother, George.

"Sister! I thought to find you here." He said with devilish charm. This was the George I had come to know; he was a wit and a raconteur through and through, I had seen his handsomely rugged good looks and disarming smile win the hearts and minds of the more cosmopolitan, younger courtiers - men and women alike. I looked at him circumspectly for a moment before replying a little sarcastically, "Then you were right, dear brother, as you can plainly see."

"The King has been asking after you – as ever." No doubt Henry made such remarks openly in the hope that George would seek me out and bring me to him, as was quite often the case. However, despite my playful exchange with my friend, my mood had not lightened and my previous irascibility surfaced easily once more.

"Has he indeed! Then let him ask – it will do him some good to miss me!" Somewhat haughtily, I swept past my brother and continued on my way. Of course, George

could not help but tease me for my disdain.

"Oh, we are feeling a bit precious!" He said, gently poking fun at me as he began to follow me along the path. "I am not amused, brother!" I retorted as I continued on my way, not looking back.

"Pray tell, what has disturbed you thus? Has the King offended you? A note of sincerity now crept into his voice. I swung about extending out my arms, palms up in exasperation,

"Honestly, are all men so completely insensitive! I am weary of being the "other woman", bowing to and flattering that woman." The more I thought on it, the more I sensed Anne's anger involuntarily gripping my body. Suddenly, I just wanted to scream with frustration, instead I added, "Does nobody understand what it's like? Henry can beckon me to his side whenever he wishes for me to be his..." I waved my hand about as I struggled to find the

most apt word, "entertainment. That's of course as long as I'm out of sight and back in my box whenever anything significant is happening! What is more, every moment I have to spend with that woman is insufferable! Why doesn't she just realise that Henry doesn't want her anymore and just fuck off to a nunnery...or even better, go back to Spain!" My words were harsh and intemperate, and it had certainly intrigued me that Anne spoke with a crassness that I had wrongly assumed was reserved for later centuries. But in truth, I was no longer sure whether this was purely Anne speaking through me or whether now, these were also my own sentiments. Exhausted from my outburst, I exhaled loudly, exasperated as my eyes rolled to the heavens and my palms fell down with resignation against my sides.

Suddenly, through the turmoil of my emotions, I saw in my mind's eye a series of images; a young girl and boy riding out from Hever Castle at full gallop, the wind tearing at their hair and clothes as they rushed headlong towards the forest. I

knew from their faces that this was a much younger Anne and George, although just children of about nine or ten years old, they were already expert riders – fearless, as children often are. I recognised these images were not my own; just as those that I had experienced on my arrival at the Palace of Beaulieu nearly three months earlier. I was sure by then that these were Anne's memories, that somehow I had access to them, as if our consciousness was not only merging in the present but also in the past. Before I had chance to gather my thoughts, Anne spoke through me clearly and with resolve.

"George, do you remember when we were children and one of us got into trouble? We always knew what the other was thinking and as soon as we could, we would escape together, riding out on our horses until we were both far, far away from Hever; exhausted but deliriously happy to be free?" I took one step toward my brother. My whole countenance had changed, transported to a happy memory of a carefree childhood; the tone of my voice, I noticed, was much softer.

"Of course, sister! How could I forget?" George laughed out loud as he went on, "We were always as one, you and I. Do you remember our mother used to say that with our high spirits that we would one day be the death of her?" For a fleeting moment, I thought of Anne and George's demise and how their mother lived on but barely another two years before dying in obscurity.



Oh my poor mother! Now, here I am in the Tower; I can hear the yeoman guard gathering in the Privy Garden below; soon they will come and fetch me to die and my mother's prophecy will finally come true; both of her children, dead and gone afore her; it will break her heart. Yet, back then, I swept those thoughts away, as there was nothing more I wanted to do than live my childhood once more. I longed to be away from the palace, even for a couple of hours; to ride out again with my brother and to be free as the birds

in the sky.

"Then let us escape again, George. Let us taste again the freedom of our youth!" I started to walk backwards; my arms outstretched inviting him to join me. "Are you coming or are you just going to stand there all day?"

"But the King – and the investiture? Father will be furious!" George called out after me, but I had already turned and was walking briskly towards the palace stables.

"What of it?" I said loudly as if challenging anybody to stop me. I heard George's feet pick up pace on the gravel pathway behind me and I knew that the wild forest and parkland was ours once more.



I was richly adorned when I set off with my brother through

the southern gate of the palace and out into the parkland beyond. I was dressed in a loose fitting, English gown of russet velvet, trimmed with fur. Underneath, was a kirtle of cream damask, whilst on my head, I sported a matching velvet cap, which was decorated with a row of pearls around the crown and a fine white ostrich feather. Wearing soft, leather boots, gloves and a fur-lined riding coat, I looked every inch a fine noblewoman. For a short while, we trotted along, passing several people who were making their way to and from the busy palace complex; mostly merchants going about their everyday business. Then, as the wide expanse of parkland opened up in front of us, I cast a conspiratorial glance at George, and a moment later, we were galloping at full tilt, as if our lives depended upon it, travelling up Castle Hill and away from the palace buildings.

The ride was truly exhilarating; the cold frosty air nipping at our cheeks and searing into our lungs. I felt alive and awed by the sheer beauty of the hoarfrost which cast a stunning

display across the trees and vegetation of the Park. At the top of the hill, was a large viewing tower, dominating the skyline and looking down on the palace below. I learned of its reputation from my brother, shortly after arriving at the Palace. The King was not only known to store some of his fine wines here under lock and key, but on occasion his mistresses; with raised eyebrows, I listened as George told me that this had often included our sister, Mary. With these thoughts at the forefront of my mind, we made our way towards it and when we reached the tower, we slowed our horses down, coming to a halt. Seated side-by-side, atop our mounts, we surveyed the full expanse of the palace precinct and the nearby village of Greenwich; it was a place that I knew so well in the 21st Century. How different it looked, how peaceful! I was still not used to just how underdeveloped the surrounding land was in comparison with my modern life. From our vantage point, I could see the River Thames winding its way back towards the City of London, with only the occasional cluster of houses scattered

along its banks. In the distance, lay the city itself and the Tower of London, clearly visible against the open countryside.

I was lost in my own thoughts as I reflected again on what I knew of Anne's life and how the Palace of Placentia at Greenwich would provide the backdrop to two of the most significant occasions in her drama. In 1533, some six years from now, as Queen of England, she would give birth to the future Queen Elizabeth I. Henry would put a brave face on what to him represented a dynastic disaster – the failure to produce a son and heir. Of course, how could either of them know that Elizabeth in time would prove to be one of England's most celebrated and successful monarchs; of formidable intelligence, sharp wit, fiery temper and impeccable style, she would always truly be her mother's daughter. Then, less than three years later, following the annual May Day joust, Henry would walk away from Anne, never to look back, never to say goodbye; the man that I

personally had grown to love, who worshipped and idolised Anne, would throw her to the wolves without a backward glance. It was at Greenwich where she would be arrested on what I firmly believed were fabricated charges of treason, incest and adultery; and it would be at Greenwich that Henry would sign her death warrant. I did not for a moment conceive then that I would witness these dramatic events in the same way that I was now witnessing, first-hand Henry's passionate pursuit of his Mistress Anne. At that stage, I still did not know what was happening to me. It did not feel like a dream, yet I was not able to comprehend how I had been dragged in to Anne's life and when I would leave it again.

"A penny for your thoughts?" My brother's voice brought me back to the present moment.

"Nothing... It's nothing." I shook my head and smiled at my brother before changing the subject in the hope that I could distract him onto a different topic. "So tell me, dear brother how is your wife, Jane. I do not see the two of you spending

much time together." There was a long pause while my brother turned to look out wistfully across the parkland. After a few moments, he turned back to me, one arm resting nonchalantly on his hip, the other lightly on the hilt of the saddle. Finally, after much consideration he said, "indifferent and insufferable."

For a moment there was silence between us. I realised that my brother was mirroring my tirade about Katherine and suddenly the perversity of our shared fate caused me to erupt into loud and raucous peals of laughter; so much so that I almost lost my balance and slipped backwards off my horse. Tears streamed down my face as I clutched my sides; a stitch from my belly laughter making it difficult to breathe. Of course, my laughter soon became infectious and George and I could not speak further for several more minutes. Eventually it died away and George spoke up.

"Come sister, let us enjoy today before we must return and

face the consequences.” He raised an eyebrow before turning his horse about and trotting off towards the woodland beyond. I glanced back at the Palace, once again wishing, hoping for a different end for Anne, before I too turned my horse about and followed my brother into the forest.



When George and I got back toward the palace in the mid afternoon, the tournament was well underway in the tiltyard. However, from a bright, sunny morning, the day had deteriorated considerably as dark, ominous clouds gathered altering the quality of light. It was to the great frustration of all present that the tournament had to be called off early.

Our father was indeed furious with us when we finally returned to our rooms. How could we have missed the King’s investiture? Where had we been? As a child, Anne would have to stand in front of her father and be

accountable for herself – and probably severely punished. However, whilst I knew that Anne respected her father, I felt disinclined to explain my need for escape and freedom, for I knew he understood little of the stresses and strains that my situation placed upon me – and upon Anne. Whilst my poor unfortunate brother received a clip across the ear; as he must have done as a small boy – my punishment amounted to no more than a vexed stare from my father. Like the rest of the court, even he had begun to treat Anne with circumspect deference. The Boleyn faction may well have been on the rise, but Sir Thomas knew as well as anyone that the King's great favour was in part due to the love he bore Mistress Anne.

In the evening, the entire court feasted in the Banqueting House at Greenwich. This fabulous building of generous proportions overlooked the tiltyard complex. That night it was decked out in rich tapestries, which were shot through with gold and silver thread. Fires roared in two large open

fireplaces, warming the hall comfortably against the encroaching winter chill and keeping all the guests in good cheer. The flickering of the flames complemented the soft light from what seemed like hundreds of candles placed around the room. Such lighting created an intimate atmosphere for catching a lover's eye, or sharing a private conversation. It was also an opportunity for all the notable lords and ladies of Henry's court to relax, reacquaint themselves with friends or relatives that they had not seen during the long summer and, of course, to make political alliances.

The day's celebrations culminated in a "Masque" arranged by Cardinal Wolsey. The King was appointed principal participant, and I too participated as one of the six young ladies of the court. It was a splendid arrangement. We ladies hid inside a mount which was called the 'Riche Mount'. The mount itself was set full of flowers of silk; the branches were of green satin; on top of the mount

stood a beacon which gave off a light, and all around the beacon sat the King and five others, dressed in coats and caps of crimson velvet, embroidered with flat gold of damask, set full of spangles of gold.

Four men had drawn the mount inside the hall until it came to rest before the Queen and the King's guest of honour, Duc Anne de Montmorency, who as the Grand Master of France, was there to represent King Francis at Henry's investiture. We had practiced this many times, and so I knew that as we came to rest, the King and his company would descend and begin to dance. After a while, the two small page boys, who were hidden in the mount with us, cast open the doors as we stepped out, helped by our gallant companions. Like the other five ladies, I was dressed in crimson satin and plunket, embroidered with gold and pearls, a French hood adorning my head.

The King and his men stepped aside and allowed the ladies to dance alone so that they could better display their

sweeping, elegant and graceful movements. I found myself positioned directly in front of Katherine. But behind my mask, I felt that I could be anybody and I noticed with some mirth, how I danced particularly provocatively. In part, I must confess that I had wanted to use this rare moment to annoy the Queen; in part, I was also aware of Henry's eyes upon me and I wanted to tempt him with the delights of my flesh. After a while, the gentlemen stepped forward once more. The King came directly over to me and took my hand as we danced only for each other, the friction of the day melting away into hot passion and unrequited sexual tension.

When the dancing was over, we were unmasked and took our applause from the guests; Henry acknowledged the appreciation of the Queen, and the Duc de Montmorency who was seated at her side. Then, with a gesture from the King, the music recommenced as other ladies and gentlemen of the court took to the floor to dance a galliard; Henry and I

among them.

"The Queen will not be pleased with you, your Majesty" I said as we began to dance, the King circling about me.

"I do not care about Katherine, as you well know." There was a slight edge to his voice before he came to what was first and foremost on his mind. "Where were you today?" He enquired as he took my hand. Gracefully, we stepped first towards each other; our palms pressed together, our lips within a hair's breath, before we moved away again.

"Out riding, Sire." I replied as Henry came in close and held my waist, facing me. "With whom?"

He shot back as he lifted me high into the air.

"My brother." I said as I landed gently back down on the ground.

"I thought you might wish to see the ceremony." I heard the note of wounded pride in Henry's voice as he took my hand and we hopped forward, flicking out our leading leg as was

much the case when one was dancing the Galliard.

"Your Grace must know that I longed to see you honoured so... and yet, I could not bear to see you any longer at Katherine's side." This of course was the truth of the matter. Henry must have known it and his irritation seemed to be promptly assuaged. There was silence between us for some time, while we allowed our bodies to communicate through the dance. After a while, Henry spoke again.

"You look beautiful, this evening, Anne. As ever, you outshine them all and I wish to behold you with a hundred eyes!" The King moved behind me, encircling my waist with one arm and brushing lightly across my cheek with the other. I felt a tidal wave of desire wash over me and struggled to control my rising passion. As I looked up, I found myself staring straight into Katherine's eyes. She had clearly been watching us, her jaw set firmly. If looks could kill, in that moment I would have been dragged down to

hell. As the music came to an end, swirling me around, Henry and I faced each other, as I dipped into a deep and lowly curtsy; the King responded with an elegant bow.

"Come to my rooms later." Henry whispered in my ear, "I have a surprise for you." With those words, the King turned and walked back to the top table which was on a raised dais. He took his seat once again next to Katherine and within moments, was deep in conversation with the Duc de Montmorency.

I watched Henry as he walked away, my eyes flicking briefly to Katherine whose shame at the way the King clearly danced so intimately with me, in front of the entire court, was written blatantly across her face. I suspected that this may well have been the most public display yet of the King's displeasure with his Queen - and of his growing love for Anne. A moment later, my father appeared at my side and voiced my silent thoughts.

"It is becoming clear to all that the King desires no one but you." My father offered me his arm - which I took - as he walked me back to our seating. Making our way through the crowd, many of the lords and ladies stepped aside, acknowledging us as we moved forward. Both my father and I nodded to them and smiled as we passed. "As you can see," my father said softly in my ear, "word of the King's intentions is spreading, every day someone declares in our favour."

"Yes, and someone also declares in Katherine's." I said grimly.

"What did the King say to you, just now?" my father enquired, as he took a goblet of wine from a passing usher and raised it to his lips.

"He asked me to come to his rooms tonight." I too had picked up a gilt silver goblet, speaking from behind it as I held it close to my mouth so that only my father could hear

my words.

"Does he want to bed you?" Sir Thomas was never squeamish about discussing matters of a sexual nature when it concerned the King's relationship with his daughter. I found it somewhat embarrassing at first, but had grown much used to his candour.

"Of course he wants to bed me!" I turned to look at my father with my eyebrows raised, making it clear that I thought that he was stating the bleeding obvious. However, I continued, "He says he has a surprise for me. Don't worry though," I added, "I have no intention of sleeping with him; although Lord knows it is oftentimes difficult to fend him off." I confess that I failed to mention to my father that it was not only Henry's passion that was becoming increasingly challenging to keep in check.

The rest of the evening passed in a delightful, intoxicating

blur. I danced with many of the King's younger companions, who were increasingly showing themselves as admirers of Anne and supporters of the Boleyn faction. Together with my friends; Nan, Mary and Joan and some of the other maids at court, we shared an evening of flirtatious laughter with these gallant young nobles. My brother held his own court in our little group of friends, telling lascivious stories of bawdy wit and sexual innuendo, which reduced us many a time into great gales of laughter and which had brought disapproving stares from some of the older generation.

The King though, did not speak with me for the rest of the evening. However, I noticed that he was oftentimes watching me with an appreciative smile. As the evening slowly drew to a close, one by one my friends melted away. Our little group was amongst the last to retire and as we left the Banqueting Hall, only five or six of us remained. The wine had flowed along with the music and laughter, and as I said goodbye to the remaining members of the group and

made my way back to my rooms, I heard their high spirited voices as they disappeared down long, half-lit corridors, heading back towards their own quarters. I smiled to myself, as I suspected that some of the courting couples would find themselves delayed in welcome shadows, tasting the delights of their lover's flesh and warm kisses.

As I mused on this, a well-dressed gentleman suddenly stepped out into the corridor in front of me. I recognised him immediately to be Sir William Compton, one of Henry's closest companions and confidantes. I had met Sir William on many occasions as he was often at the King's side, particularly when we had gone out hunting or hawking. He had always proved himself to be an entirely affable character; gregarious (as many of the King's closest male friends were), well mannered and valiant. Interestingly, he was one of the few individuals who always seemed to go out of his way to avoid the politics of court faction. I suspect that like Charles Brandon, his enduring favour with the King was that he devoted himself entirely and without

question to the King's pleasure. I dipped a slight curtsy as I said, "Sir William."

Sir William returned my greeting, replying, "Mistress Anne. The King has asked that I should find you and requests that you join him in his privy chamber." With that, Sir William stepped aside and indicated that I should make my way towards the King's apartments. All evening I had been vexed by the thought of how to respond to the King's invitation. In the previous three months, since I had found myself in Anne's world, I had never been invited to the King's apartments alone at such a late hour.

It was true, there was nothing more that I wanted at that stage than to sink into his arms once more, and in some ways, this is what terrified me the most. I did not know whether in the quiet and private intimacy of the King's secret rooms, in the warmth of his embrace and in the passion of our kisses, whether I could truly do what I knew I must

above all else – preserve Anne's virginity. Henry had many opportunities to force himself upon me in the past – yet he had not done so.

Whilst he no doubt yearned to know me – to know Anne – entirely, I knew that perversely he was enjoying the chase - as men of considerable power are often wont to do. I had to also admit that my curiosity had been piqued. It was not the first time that evening that I wondered what surprise Henry intended to share with me.

Sir William and I made our way along many corridors towards the King's apartments, which were situated on the river front, on the opposite side of the palace complex to the Banqueting House. We spoke little to each other; Sir William merely indicating from time to time the route that we should travel. Once in the King's suite of rooms, I was surprised to find that with the exception of a couple of yeomen of the guards, — they were entirely deserted.

Although I had never been in the King's Privy Chambers so late at night, I imagined - as was the case in the Queen's rooms - that a number of the Lord Chamberlain's staff would be busy relaying the fires, sweeping floors and collecting the remnants of beeswax candles, in order to prepare for the day ahead. Yet we encountered no one. I remembered wryly that Sir William was renowned at court as the man who enabled many of the King's secret assignations; preserving the King's privacy and dignity through his many adulterous encounters. I suspected that Sir William had the rooms cleared on the orders of the King and in preparation for my visit.

Whilst this made me slightly uneasy, with no one around, I was able to appreciate the beauty of the Tudor interior without distraction. Most of the rooms contained largely movable items that could be transported with the King whenever he moved from palace to palace. The most expensive and prized of these items were huge tapestries

made of silk, often spun with silver and gold thread. Carpets were also highly valuable and many – much to my amusement in those early days– were hung on walls or laid out on tables to be admired; often placed only on the floor in those most exalted areas of state, such as underneath the King's throne in the Presence Chamber. Having walked through a short gallery leading from that very same room, I stepped into Henry's Privy Chamber. This room was his main, private living area. It was one that I had been in on many occasions before in the evening; often dining or playing cards with the King and other members of his most intimate circle. That night, however, the room was empty. I turned around to speak to Sir William, and to enquire of the King's whereabouts, just in time to see him close the door behind me, leaving me all alone.

I began to wander slowly around the room, running my fingertips across the surface of the large, oak sideboard which was adorned with a huge pair of silver gilt

candlesticks. I noticed that drawn across the mullioned windows were curtains made of purple, white and black satin, each lined with linen; gaudy by modern day standards but entirely *de rigueur* in the 16th century. As I surveyed the room, my eyes were drawn upwards to take in the breathtaking beauty of the ceiling which was laid out in a geometrical pattern, enriched with moulded grotesque strips and highlighted with gold paint. At the centre of each pattern was a carved and painted Tudor Rose. Beneath the ceiling, running around the upper third of the walls, was a frieze of highly decorative oil paintings, all depicting religious scenes. Below this, the lower two thirds were covered in linen-fold oak panelling. On one side of the room was a hugely ornate fireplace, which I had admired on several previous occasions. On that night, it was lit by the flames casting gentle, willowy shadows about the chamber. I walked over, positioning myself in front of it, soon becoming mesmerised by the flames, which licked at the expensive sea coal, a luxury that was reserved only for

the use of the King and Queen

After a few moments, I sensed that I was being watched. Looking over my shoulder, I saw the King leaning nonchalantly against the doorway leading to the room beyond; a room which I knew to be the King's State Bedchamber. Oh, I can see him so clearly in my mind's eye, as if I could reach out and touch him again. Henry was dressed only in his linen shirt - which was open loosely around his neck - his breeches, hose and boots. One leg was crossed over other at the ankle and in his right hand he drank from a silver gilt goblet. With the King's appearance, I turned around and dipped into a deep curtsy, as I said,

"Your Grace. You wished to see me." Rising up, I looked again at Henry. I was a woman in love, and perhaps wearing rose tinted spectacles, but I couldn't help thinking how incredibly sexy he looked; a little tousled, relaxed and inviting; perhaps too inviting. Henry did not speak, but holding my stare he made his way towards me, putting the

goblet down on a table as he passed by. Suddenly, he was standing directly in front of me. For a moment we were entirely motionless, transfixed only by the other's gaze, hardly daring to breathe. Then with an almighty explosion of passion, we fell into each other's arms. Our kisses were hungry and voracious; we devoured each other entirely. After several minutes, we had torn ourselves apart - I clutching onto Henry's chest, and he, holding me strongly in his arms. I looked deeply into the eyes of the King of England and saw passion, desire, longing and also sweet, gentle love. I think now that our intensity amused even us. We began to smile at each other and then laugh; we were happy to have some precious time alone together, just Henry and Anne.

"Now, sweetheart, I have a surprise for you. Come here." He took me by the hand, and as he sat down on a nearby chair, he guided me to sit up on his lap. His arms around me, he stroked my cheek and continued to plant soft, tender kisses

on my lips as he spoke. "I have decided that you shall no more wait upon Katherine. Henceforth, I will provide for you three of your own ladies-in-waiting whilst you are at court. How does that suit you, sweetheart?" Henry's words brought forth a huge surge of excitement. Breaking into the broadest grin, I threw my arms around his neck and covered Henry in kisses before I replied, "Oh your Majesty... Henry. What can I say? Thank you, thank you, thank you!" In sheer joy, a tear had flowed down my cheek, which Henry wiped away with his thumb. I had learnt that he was a man, a King, who delighted in the reactions of those upon whom he bestowed gifts. I can see his face now, lit up as it was, radiant at my appreciation of his gesture.

If Henry had called me to his chamber that evening to make love to me, I wondered whether I would have been able to fend him off. Yet somehow, despite our mutual desire, that evening we seemed simply content with more innocent pleasures of a courting couple, as we stayed up into the

very small hours of the morning, talking about our hopes
and plans; sharing wine, laughter and kisses.

Chapter Twelve

Hever Castle

November 17, 1527

A little over a week later, and I found myself swept along the driveway in our family's litter towards Hever Castle. Wrapped up in numerous furs, I was well protected against the biting cold, which had been relentless since the beginning of November. As we approached, I strained my neck to get a glimpse of our pretty family home as it came into view, and as I did so, I reflected upon the events of the past seven days.

Following that wonderful evening spent alone in Henry's arms, the court – including myself – had awoken the next morning still enthralled by the splendour of the previous evening's festivities. Many a person was heard to comment that it seemed as if it had been a fantastical dream. However, slightly more disconcerting to both Henry and me, were the

rampant rumours now circulating the court that the King's lust for Mistress Anne was the only reason that his Majesty was seeking an annulment. Henry was furious; demanding to know which courtiers had been spreading such malicious gossip. How had they dared to question the King's integrity? My father was present when the King used the foulest language, even at one point accusing the unknown perpetrators of treason. Of course, the whole court was talking, and Henry well knew it; no one person could be singled out for blame. Henry realised that this could be politically damaging if such gossip were to reach the courts of Europe, even Rome; his case for an annulment, already running into sticky ground, could well be shipwrecked and fatally lost. When father relayed these events to me later that day in our own apartments, I knew straightaway what must be done. That very afternoon, I sought an audience with the King.

We were alone, with only a small number of the King's

personal guard attending us, as we walked together, arm in arm, through the gardens at Greenwich. Henry was still angry as I attempted to soothe his anxieties, before putting my proposition before him. I suggested that I remove myself from court and return with my mother to Hever. Initially, Henry was very much against my idea, as he wished me to remain with him for Christmas. Yet, as I spoke rationally and calmly, I pointed out that it would be exactly my absence from court during the festive season that would allow time for the gossip about our relationship to die down – for if the King seriously intended to make me his wife, I would surely be present at the greatest celebration of the year – the Twelve Days of Christmas!

I argued that the winter would soon be over, and the new round of diplomatic negotiations would begin. Henry could move forward with a clean conscience that he had treated his Queen with all due deference, even though his mind was sorely troubled regarding the validity of

their marriage. Furthermore, there would be no ammunition for the Imperial ambassador, Mendoza, to use against the King, with his master, The Holy Roman Emperor, and Katherine's nephew, Charles V. As we walked along, Henry brooded silently, considering my argument for some time, before he nodded his head and agreed that this was indeed the way to proceed. The next five days were a blur. My mother organised our travel arrangements and made ready with the packing of our clothes and belongings.

My father and brother were to remain at court, celebrating Christmas with the King, as was expected of all his nobles. It was to be a quiet Christmas indeed at Hever, yet in many ways, I was already looking forward to the peace, solitude and the chance to gather my thoughts on what had been a most extraordinary three months. There was only one task for me to complete before I left Greenwich. I spoke individually to Nan, Mary and Joan and asked them if they would care to leave the Queen's service and become the

first three members of Anne Boleyn's household. In truth, I was a little unsure as to how they might react. However, each one lit up in radiant expectation and delight that we would become the centre of a young and energetic influence at court and of course, each was overjoyed at the prospect of escaping the stifling boredom of Katherine's Privy Chambers. Yet, I knew that the adventure would have to wait, as I explained that, upon pain of death, they must say nothing of their appointments until I returned to court in the spring. Accompanied with much groaning and rolling of the eyes, I also explained that until that time, they must remain in Katherine's service as if nothing had changed.

On the day of our departure, I was summoned by the King to his private chambers to say goodbye. We embraced tenderly, clutching onto each other as if we could not bear to be parted, even for a moment, let alone several months. Henry stroked my face and kissed my

forehead; he told me over and over that he loved and desired me above all others and that I should remain of stout heart and good cheer until we could be reunited once more. He begged me to write often, so that he should continue to know that I was well, and to be assured of the constancy of my heart and mind. With solemn agreement to do so, we kissed passionately one more time before I curtsied, turned and walked out of the room. I could not bear to look back; for the empty sorrow of parting had already taken shape like a heavy stone in my heart.

I thought on all these things as I looked across the carriage at my mother, who was travelling with me. Despite the fact that she too was well wrapped in opulent furs, she looked tired and drawn. It had been a bitterly cold and uncomfortable journey; the earth below the wheels of our carriage was unyielding, muddy tracks now frozen solid, jolted us interminably this way and that, making progress painfully slow. My mother was sitting back, her eyes

closed and her brow furrowed, which made me concerned that she was suffering and perhaps in pain. I reached across and gently laid my gloved hand on her knee.

"Mother, you look unwell. Are you all right? I had never seen Elizabeth Boleyn in anything but the most robust of health. Anne's mother opened her eyes, smiled and said,

"I am fine, my child. Do not worry. My advancing years make these journeys a little more arduous than they once were, but it is nothing that a warm fire and a cup of posset will not cure." At that moment, our little litter drew up adjacent to the drawbridge of the castle. The small courtyard within made it impossible for us to enter without alighting and making the last few yards of our journey on foot.

My mother stepped out of the litter first. As I descended, a snowflake fell upon my face. By the time I had crossed the drawbridge and entered the courtyard, it

began to snow more heavily. I looked up towards the sky; enchanted by the myriad of snowflakes as they swirled and danced their way to the ground. The first snow of the winter had finally arrived. I clutched my fur-lined cloak about me, before hurrying inside to melt my frozen hands and feet in front of the warm fire.



My mother and I soon settled back into the everyday routine of daily life; of running the castle as any competent gentlewoman was expected to do. The snowfall which began on the day of our arrival continued intermittently over the next week or so, leaving the Kentish countryside almost two feet deep in pristine, virgin snow. The icy temperatures meant that none of it melted, and the surface of the little moat around our castle was soon frozen solid.

Our servants kept the fires well lit and for the most part, my mother and I stayed at home; amusing ourselves with taking

exercise in the Long Gallery, reading, playing cards, doing embroidery and speculating a great deal about the goings-on at court. Because of the inclement weather, we received no letters either from our father, or from the King. Nor was I able to send any letters to Henry, although I mused that it would do him no harm to miss me.

Much to my amusement, I noticed that I had long since lost my 21st century addiction to busyness and the need to always be on the go. I found myself now largely content with the unhurried pace of 16th century living. Anne and I shared a love of nature and fresh air, and it was only on the very harshest of wintry days, when blizzards whipped the snow in great swirls around the castle, that I kept entirely indoors. On most days, I would wrap myself up and go walking, drinking in the crisp, clean air and the exquisite beauty and silence that comes only when the countryside is enfolded in a deep blanket of snow.

As before, I was again drawn to the castle's library. My love

of books and my thirst for knowledge caused me to pass many hours in its pleasant company. At court, I had heard many of Anne's contemporaries refer to, or read from, the novel, '*Roman de la Rose*'; a medieval poem of French origin, whose purpose was both to entertain and teach about the art of love. I wanted to learn more about the thinking that shaped the 16th Century mind on matters of love; so after some searching, I found a beautifully illustrated manuscript tucked away in the cupboards of the library. Anne's fluency in French meant that I had no trouble in devouring it; delighting in the romance of the story and in unpicking its many hidden allegorical meanings.

However, on that particular day, I found myself setting aside this prose and instead turning my attention to my Book of Hours which had become my constant companion, and which I found myself turning over and over in my hands. I was deep in thought, reflecting that since we had returned from court, I had spent more time in my mother's company than I had since before setting off to the Palace of

Beaulieu in early August. The two of us often passed the evening with my reading passages to her out loud from religious works, as we sat by the light of the fire.

On one such evening, I had the opportunity to delve more deeply into these beliefs and Anne's interest in Lutheranism, as it was then called by her contemporaries. Sitting down with my mother after supper as usual, Elizabeth Boleyn reached over and handed me a book which I had not seen before. As I opened it, I immediately recognised that it was different from the usual books that I had so far been privy to; instead of being a hand-written, illuminated manuscript in French or Latin, this book was printed in English. Before I could speak, my mother spoke for me.

"It is Master Tyndale's version of the New Testament. Our contact, Master Locke in Antwerp, sent it through for your father whilst we were away at court." Elizabeth Boleyn sat back in her chair and nonchalantly picked up her

embroidery, as if it were of no significance that she had just handed me a book which I knew was banned in England. I flicked through its pages, awed that I was holding in my very hands an original copy of the first English translation of the New Testament. Part of me felt anxious that I had in my possession a text which could have me declared a heretic and burned at the stake. However, along with fear, I was also excited by the freedom that this book represented; a powerful break from the stifling domination of the clergy and the perceived malpractices of Holy Roman Church. I sensed that Anne was becoming more comfortable with this new learning and for the first time, I felt her growing passion for the reformed faith well up within me.

I ran my hands over the smooth leather cover of the book, wondering who Master Locke was. I knew both from my understanding of history, and listening to court gossip, that Antwerp was a free city surrounded by the Holy Roman Empire, and as such it was a centre for English exiles,

who were also evangelical reformers, such as William Tyndale. I rightly assumed that Master Locke must be an intermediary, smuggling such texts into England from the continent. I also mused on how the family could have developed such networks and contacts when my mother answered my silent question yet again.

"Sending you to France in the service of Mary Tudor was the making of you, child. Your father and I did the best we could for you here, at Hever, but you have a sharp eye and a keen wit and you learned well the tongue and the manners of the French court." My mother, busily working embroidery onto a fine linen shirt whilst she spoke, paused and looked up at me as she went on, "Not to mention the many learned and godly men that you had the good grace to meet; although, your father played a large role in that."

Elizabeth Boleyn returned to her embroidery. As she continued, I listened attentively, gaining valuable

information about Anne's early life. "Now, I believe what you told me – on the day that the King proposed to you – that God has indeed chosen you to bring the light to England; you have the King's ear and you alone will be able to open his eyes to the corruption of the church." Then almost speaking to herself, she added, "Yes, your time in France made you into a desirable young woman, fit for the attentions of the King – and for the purpose of doing God's work." After a short silence, she added, "It is just unfortunate that your sister has neither your intelligence, nor your discretion." I heard the coldness in my mother's voice as she touched on the subject of my sister. I felt the need to defend Mary who had showed me nothing but kindness and generosity. "Mother, Mary is a kind and loving creature with a warm heart. I do not believe the worst of her." I said earnestly.

"That may be so Anne, but the plain and simple truth is that her behaviour at the French court with King Francis was

shameful!" Putting her embroidery down once more, my mother went on, speaking emphatically and becoming ever angrier, "I even heard tell that the French King referred to Mary as his 'English mare' as he had ridden her so often! Then not content to squander her own name and ours across the courts of Europe, she falls straight into the King's bed when she arrives back in England! For shame! Her behaviour has been inexcusable for a good Christian woman." My mother was in full stride, and not to be interrupted. "That girl is morally corrupt and sometimes...I am ashamed that she's my daughter" She paused for a moment before going on, "... and look where it has got her! Your sister should look to you for good sense and moral guidance for Lord knows your father and I seemed to have failed miserably as far as she is concerned."

I said no more about it, as I could see it was a sensitive subject. Whilst I had some sympathy for my mother, who was clearly deeply religious and socially conscious –

unsurprising, since she had been brought up in a fiercely proud and aristocratic family – I also felt irritated on Mary's behalf. I felt that she was being harshly judged, particularly since her adulterous affair with the King benefitted the family to an extent. However, I bit my tongue and changed the subject. I sensed that Anne loved her mother deeply. I was also becoming very attached to Elizabeth Boleyn, the only mother I had ever really known.

As I sat in the window seat of the library, looking out over the moat and the gardens beyond, I reflected on all that I had learnt during that evening, and sighed. My thoughts suddenly turned to the King and I wondered what he was doing, whether he was missing me in the same way that I longed for his presence and the warmth of his embrace. I also realised that I missed dreadfully the thrill of court life; the hunting, the music, the dancing – and of course, Henry.

The ridiculous thing is that, I knew where the story was going; that Henry and Anne would be married. But it was

only Christmas, 1527 and they had nearly five years to wait! But I knew all about the art of waiting. Daniel and I had been in a relationship for five years, and we too never seemed any closer to our dream of being together. History told us that Anne would get her man, although it will ultimately cost her life. The question was, when I returned to my modern day life, would I also get mine and would there be a penalty to pay? As I opened the book resting in my lap, there was the picture of 'The Last Judgement'. I was suddenly and inexplicably agitated as I sensed Anne's feelings of frustration well up within me. By then, I had become adept at identifying her emotions from my own. When she was 'speaking' through me, I always felt somewhat detached, as if I were an observer. In those moments, I was aware of thoughts, emotions and passions arising from a separate consciousness to my own. In an effort to calm Anne down, I whispered under my breath,

"The time will come, Anne, the time will come. Be

patient.” Suddenly, I felt compelled to write, so I picked up the quill on the seat next to me and began to doodle. Underneath the picture, I wrote '*Le Temps Viendra, Je Anne Boleyn*'. Then I drew a picture of what I knew to be an astrolabe – a device for measuring time, which I had seen many times in the King's private collection of scientific instruments. I sat back watching the ink dry. Anne's writing was neat and precise. I stared hard at the page, overwhelmed as I began to realise the significance of what I had just written. To my amazement, I recalled that I had seen this writing before. This declaration, written in Anne's own Book of Hours, would be one of the few artefacts that would survive; one of the few examples of Anne's handwriting that would endure into the 21st century, giving us a rare insight into a private moment of reflection. Yes, I had seen this before, displayed at Hever Castle in the 21st century. I remember standing in front of the glass cabinet, drawn to these few poignant words, which I always felt said so much about Anne's story. Suddenly, I realised that

this book must remain, for safekeeping, at Hever Castle. I dared not take it with me back to court, where Anne's enemies might have the opportunity to destroy it. Setting my quill aside, I got up and walked over to one of the cabinets containing my father's valuable collection of books and slipped this little book between two large volumes, where I hoped it would remain safe. I paused for a moment, running my finger down its spine for one last time, wondering if the next time that I saw this book, one which had meant so much to me, would be in the 21st century.

Chapter Thirteen

Heber Castle

December 24, 1527

As Christmas approached, my mother busied herself making the necessary preparations. I could not understand why we were doing so, when there would only be the two of us and my father's mother, Lady Margaret Butler, to celebrate. Elizabeth Boleyn involved me in many of the duties expected of a noble woman running her own household at Christmastime. I tried to throw myself into my tasks, but with father and my brother, George, at court for the festive season and dearly missing the man I loved, I found myself regularly dragging my metaphorical heels. So much so, that on one morning after visiting the kitchens to discuss with the head cook what food should be prepared over the festive season, I found myself complaining to my mother about the

futility of our efforts. My mother was quick to reply, "Dear child, we do not know what guests we may receive over the Christmas period. What would it look like if we were not prepared and had nothing appropriate to offer our visitors?"

"But we have been home for over a month and we have yet to have any visitors." I said plaintively. "Anyway, who would come by in such weather?"

"That is beside the point." My mother retorted emphatically. "It is our duty to be ready and run a goodly household – whether your father is here or not." If nothing else, I always knew that my mother had a strong sense of duty – a character trait not well valued in the 21st century, but of immense importance in Anne's world. I conceded defeat and said nothing more, although, I did not believe for a moment that any likely visitors would be hardy enough to brave the fierce winter chill.

However, much to my delight and surprise, I was proven

wrong. On Christmas Eve morning, we received an unexpected visit from Margaret Wyatt; Thomas Wyatt's elder sibling. I first met Margaret - or Margery as her family and close friends called her - earlier in the summer when we visited the Wyatt family home at Allington Castle. I enjoyed her company on that sunny afternoon; and I sensed from the ease of her relationship with me, that she and Anne were probably long-time friends. However, I did not fully appreciate at that time that Margery would be a pillar of strength to me – and to Anne - in the months and years to come. Already a dear friend, she would become someone I would cherish, as if she were my own sister.

After offering Margery something to eat and drink, and a warm fire to thaw the chill from her travel, my mother tactfully withdrew leaving the two of us alone. Elizabeth Boleyn clearly appreciated the long-standing and intimate friendship that existed between her daughter and Margery, and that we would value some time alone together to catch

up. I guessed that being neighbours, the Boleyn and the Wyatt children had often spent many a happy hour together during their childhood; forging lifelong friendships and alliances. As I sat opposite Margery in the parlour at Hever, watching her warming her hands around a steaming cup of posset, I became aware that I felt relaxed and completely myself in her company. Whilst my friends at court – Nan, Joan and Mary – were entirely beloved to me, Margery's presence brought a different type of energy; one that was more grounded, practical and in some ways, maternal. I was soon to find out why.

During her visits over the next few weeks, I would learn about Margery's life and family circumstances. Margery was a little over ten years older than Anne, and the eldest of the Wyatt children. My 21st century sensibilities left me shocked to find out that she had been married at fifteen to John Rogers of Warwickshire. The marriage was a happy one and much to their delight, two years later, Margery gave

birth to their first child, also called John. Her second son, William born in 1509, tragically died at the age of five. Although she rarely spoke about William, I soon understood that the 16th century mind was more accepting of the inevitability of death; when she did speak of him, her deep sadness was rooted in a pragmatic and stoic understanding of God's will. Four more children followed by the time that I met her; Edward, by then sixteen, Eleanor, thirteen, William, twelve and her youngest, Joan, aged eleven.

As my friend settled in front of the fire, I had a chance to take in her appearance. Margery was a striking looking woman. Like her brother, Thomas Wyatt, she was slim and above average height, being a little taller than Anne. With fairly sharp facial features, including a long, pointed nose and slightly pointed chin, high cheek bones and piercing blue eyes, Margery could look quite formidable when her face was set in concentration, anger or anxiety, but when she smiled, my friend radiated an incredible warmth and

kindness. On that Christmas Eve, Margery was dressed elegantly in an English gown of deep reddish/brown wool. This was lined with velvet, in order to give extra warmth in the fiercely cold winter, whilst underneath this outer gown, she wore a pretty orange damask kirtle. I would soon learn that Margery had as much love as Anne for fine clothes, and the latest fashions. Indeed, I appreciated how the colours in her dress beautifully complimented Margery's auburn hair, which was parted in the centre beneath her French hood. Amongst my friend's best features was her long and slender neck, which on that day was adorned with a gold chain, whilst an amber brooch was pinned to the front of her tightly laced kirtle.

Margaret continued talking, whilst I admired her appearance, but my attention was drawn back to the conversation when I heard her say,

"... My husband has not been so well of late, complaining of pains in his abdomen. I hope he will soon be well again" She

paused briefly, concern furrowing her brow, and then continued. "Since he had some business to attend to, and on account of his ill-health, he decided to remain at home, in Warwickshire. Kind and gentle man that he is, he insisted that I visit my parents over the festive season as planned...but with the weather being so bad, I think we may find ourselves here little longer than we first anticipated!" Margery smiled conspiratorially, then added under her breath, "However, that is all the better for us, is it not, Anne? Perhaps you and your mother could come and stay with us at Allington for a few days? That would be so wonderful!" I suddenly felt guilty that I had not been paying attention to my friend's story, but I then gave myself over to her entirely, nodding and saying that I would like that very much. We chatted pleasantly about her family and her parents for some time, before the conversation turned to the inevitable; the King's ever more ardent pursuit of Mistress Anne.

"My father tells me that the court is abuzz with rumours of the King's love for you. I hear say that some are even predicting that he means to set aside Queen Katherine and to make you his wife." Margery spoke softly, with no trace of judgement toward me. Such directness made it even more clear to me that a great deal of intimacy existed between these two women. Although I bore no ill will to my friend, I realised that I felt weary of the necessity to constantly explain myself and the situation I found myself in with Henry. My friend must have picked up my reluctance to speak and added quickly,

"Oh I'm sorry, Anne. It is not my place to pry, please forgive me but..." I reached over and touched Margery's arm. "No, no, no.... It is not that. I'm not offended by your question it's just that... Well... Ah Margery! I cannot tell you how wonderful it is to be the centre of Henry's world. He has this incredible, captivating personality that lures you in, and to be loved by him is to feel like being

worshipped as a goddess - it is a sweet nectar indeed! Yet it is not always so easy...there are many.....who would wish that you simply disappear...who would vilify you and call you a whore?" My friend interrupted brusquely. "Am I right?" Silently and dolefully I nodded, a little taken aback by my friend's directness. Like any true friend, Margery's mouth had become set hard in anger on my behalf. "I've no doubt that first amongst these is Katherine herself?" "Of course." I said quietly.

"And I suspect that the only way for the King to have you at court with propriety is with you as a maid of honour to Katherine?" Margery knew only too well that without the Queen, there would be no ladies at court; for to be in the service of the Queen was the only socially acceptable position for a gentlewoman in a world dominated by men.

The closeness of our friendship allowed me to speak plainly, so I told Margery of Henry's promise to remove me from the Queen's service and to set up my own

household when I return to court. "Then it is true, Anne. The King does intend to make you his wife?" I believe that even Margery was shocked by the unprecedented prospect of the situation. However, she spoke softly, almost in a whisper and without any sense of condemnation toward me.

"It is true but you must not speak of this to anybody – not yet anyway. The King is looking to Rome for an annulment for his marriage. Yet the Pope is reluctant to provide it." I began to explain the many twists and turns in this strange story, of the politics that were beginning to emerge, when Margery interrupted me. Well educated and well-versed in the ways of the Tudor court, it was clear that even then, she knew well the difficulties that lay ahead.

"Well, I'm not surprised the Pope is reluctant since he is virtually the prisoner of Katherine's nephew, Charles V, is he not?" Margery's question was rhetorical and she added "He can hardly upset the Holy Roman Emperor. And it would

not surprise me if Katherine isn't already scheming behind her husband's back. As you well know, my father was a long time in the service of the late King Henry VII. He is well acquainted with Katherine from her early days at court and often speaks of her stubborn pride. I fear she will not go quietly."

"Oh Margery, that woman is insufferable! If it weren't for my friends, Mary Norris, Nan Gainsford and Joan Champernowe, I sometimes think I might go mad!" Margery looked at me in silence for a short while. I could see her taking in all the ramifications of these new developments and yet when she spoke again it was not of Henry or Katherine's well-being – but of my own.

"Anne, I beg you to be careful. The Queen has powerful connections both within the court and on the continent. When she realises that you are not like Henry's other mistresses and that his heart is set on making you his wife and his Queen; Katherine will do everything within her

power to retain what many see as her rightful position. What is more, you are sympathetic to those who are dissatisfied with the corruption of the clerics within the Church. There will be many who will fear what your rising influence with the King will mean for those conservatives who cherish the old ways of Catholicism." I remained silent, digesting my friend's words and as I did so, I looked deeply into the glowing embers of the fire. It was Margery who spoke again first. "When do you plan to return to court?"

"I cannot say, but I think it will not be until the spring. There was much gossip about the King's intentions toward me at court following the celebrations for his Majesty's investiture. We thought that my absence would give an opportunity for the gossip to abate – at least a little." I paused, before a wry smile passed across my lips and I continued, "The King, of course, had misgivings about the validity of his marriage long before he knew me." I added truthfully, "Henry has told me this on many occasions." I

laughed out loud, throwing my head back as I savoured the irony of the situation. "Of course, nobody sees that. All they see is Mistress Anne..." by then, I was beginning again to feel somewhat irritated by the injustice of it all, as I had done so many times before. I could hear the frustration creep into my voice as I said emphatically and sarcastically, "Mistress Anne Boleyn - the infamous whore!"

"Most of that motley group at court would do well to look to their own marriages first before they start pointing the finger at anybody else!" I was so very grateful for her unconditional support. "Just look at the Duke of Norfolk and the shameful way he treats his own wife! But you know the reality of it, Anne? It does not matter who you really are, or what is the truth of the situation; people barely look further than the end of their own noses, and most of the time they don't even want to know the truth because they see too much of themselves in it! Katherine will be seen as the helpless victim – and you...you will be the heartless

usurper.”

"I know! I know!" I said in a raised voice, my palms turned upwards and outstretched, emphasising my frustration, before I let them collapse onto my lap in sorry defeat. Margery considered me once again with one of her pragmatic silences and then spoke decisively.

"Anne, you need friends to protect you in that vipers' den; friends who will be your eyes and ears. I should speak to my husband for the time is approaching for me to return to court, if you will allow me..." Margery nodded her head as if she had already made up her mind and my permission would be irrelevant, "...as your true and loyal friend and companion." However, my assent had already been gladly given. I was deeply touched by Margery's commitment to me in the face of her ailing husband and duties to her young family. With tears flowing down my cheeks, Margery got up and moved over to me; putting her motherly arms

around me, she held me close. I felt a brave optimism at having a new-found friend that would never be far from my side. As it turned out, like Nan, Margery would remain loyally at my side until first the King, and then death, would finally wrench us apart.



Almost two weeks later, my mother and I arrived back at Hever, having spent Twelfth Night celebrations as guests of honour of Sir Henry Wyatt and his wife, Elizabeth at Allington Castle. It was a glorious affair, their family home buzzing with the activity of their large, extended family, several close friends and neighbouring families of gentle birth. Only Thomas, in active service at court, was missing, although I was somewhat relieved. As much as I enjoyed Thomas' easy manner and entertaining banter, when our paths crossed at court, I would often find him gazing at me with eyes that conveyed beleaguered hope and emptiness.

I was also extremely wary of endangering Thomas. I recalled earlier that summer, during a game of bowls with the King, Thomas had foolishly pulled out the locket which he had stolen from me during our game of blind man's bluff at Allington. A dispute had broken out between the two men over whose bowl had won the day, but I later understood from Mary Norris, whose husband Sir Henry had witnessed the game, that the debate had become quite heated.

It seems the King had pointed towards his bowl declaring victory, at the same time, pointedly extending his little finger, which was adorned by a ring that clearly belonged to Mistress Anne, the King's beloved. Sir Thomas must have recognised this as such, and drew my locket from his doublet, using the ribbon to measure the distance between the bowl and the jack. As Sir Henry had explained to my friend Mary over dinner that evening, it was clear that the argument was less about who would be the victor of the

game and more about who had won Mistress Boleyn's heart!

When Henry recognised my locket, he declared loudly, "Then I must be deceived!" and he had stormed off to find me. I knew that much, for the next thing that happened was that Henry burst into our apartments, demanding to speak with me. I was playing my harpsichord, singing a sweet ballad for my mother, as she embroidered by the fire side. Upon Henry's fiery entrance, we were both startled, arising quickly and sinking into a deep curtsy. Henry had dismissed my mother brusquely, without even taking his gaze from me. Neither my mother, nor I, had seen the King so irate and could not begin to guess what could cause this choleric rage. Elizabeth Boleyn, who was intimidated by the King's presence at the best of times, was terrified, scuttling from the room with our two maids, only pausing briefly at the door to cast a concerned and anxious glance in my direction.

When we were alone, the King had exploded into a fit of jealous ranting, pacing the room demanding to know of my relationship with Thomas Wyatt and whether he, the King, had been deceived in my love and loyalty towards him. For a moment, I was unsure how to react, until Anne calmly and boldly spoke through me. With great temerity and courage, I strode over to the King and faced him square on, stopping him in his tracks. Looking Henry straight in the eye, I spoke the truth without fear; that Sir Thomas had stolen the locket from me without my permission, earlier that year and that my heart was true and my body chaste, and that I had already surrendered myself entirely to the King. My fierce composure and unflinching gaze must have conveyed the sincerity of my words, for rapidly the King's blustering indignation subsided into an abashed affection, as he covered me in gentle kisses and I soothed away his fears with my caresses and assurances.

When I saw Thomas a few days later and I was certain that

we were alone, God help me but I vented my anger, furious at his recklessness for endangering my reputation and my future. Although I could not convey this to Thomas, I had also been scared for our lives. I forbade him entirely from further inappropriate and foolhardy behaviour, and from ever mentioning my name to the King again.



Just as dusk was settling over Hever Castle, my mother and I arrived back to be greeted in its small Entrance Hall by our maids, Bess and Alice who helped us remove our furs and other outer garments. As they were doing so, Bess had spoke up, addressing her words to me.

"Whilst you were away, Madame, a messenger arrived from the King. He was carrying a letter and a gift of a buck for the table. On the King's orders, the messenger insisted that we lodge him here at the castle until your return, for I understand that the King's Grace wishes to hear

of your health directly from your own hand."

In the last few weeks, away from Henry, I had reflected a good deal about the situation that Anne found herself in. Living and breathing every step of this historic love, I surprised myself by the strength of my own feelings towards Henry, whose presence by then, I craved more than I dare even admit to myself. I knew Anne to be intelligent, level-headed and determined, yet she was also a woman, who had fallen deeply in love with her Prince. Even at that early stage, in 1527, when the King was completely besotted with Anne, it was clear that a happy outcome was improbable; politically the stakes were too high and the passion too intense. My intuition told me to break free; but the expectations and ambitions of the Boleyn family made it ever more impossible to retreat; as did my ever deepening desire to be at Henry's side. I had desired a message from the King since returning to Hever from Greenwich, and I found myself dizzy with excitement when it at last

arrived. Reluctant to show the depth of my feelings outwardly, I said to Bess calmly, and with a certain degree of feigned indifference, "Then you had best tarry no more and bring me the King's letter in the parlour."

Alone in the sitting room, by the flickering light of candlelight, I paced back and forth as I read the King's words, which were scrawled elegantly across the crisp parchment.

My mistress and friend,

Although, my mistress, you have not been pleased to remember your promise when I was last with you, to let me hear news of you, I think it part of a true servant to enquire after his mistress's health, and send you this, desiring to hear of your prosperity. I also send by the bearer a buck killed by me this very day, hoping when you eat of it you will think of the hunter.

In the meantime, I and my heart put ourselves in your hands. Let not absence lessen your affection; for it causes us more pain than I should ever have thought, reminding us of the point of astronomy that

the longer the days are, the further off is the sun, and yet the best is all the greater. So it is with our love, which keeps its further in absence at least on our side. Prolonged absence would be intolerable, if it were not for my firm hope in your indissoluble affection.

Written by the hand of your servant, who often wishes you in the place of your brother.

HR

I smiled and pressed the letter close to my breast, thinking with some amusement of Henry, longing for my presence; yet having to make do with the surrogate company of my boisterous younger brother. I marvelled at the potency of love to fill a person with radiant joy and overwhelming happiness even at a distance from the object of their affection. I read the letter over and over, as I often did when the King wrote to me; all the while, hearing his voice in my head and imagining the warm scent of his skin filling my nostrils.

After some moments pleasantly lost in my own thoughts, I remembered that the King's messenger was waiting for my reply. I made haste to write my letter to Henry. Moving over to the nearby desk, I sat down rearranging the full skirts of my gown and pulling a nearby candle toward me so that I might see well enough to write. I recalled the first time that I had written to the King - shortly after my arrival in Anne's world. I was so unsure as to what to say until Anne had taken control and composed my reply in fluent French. I had now come to know the man intimately, and my words flowed easily.

Sire,

Most humbly I thank your esteemed Majesty for your kind words and most generous gift which I shall never be able to deserve without your help. I send good tidings that I have been and remain in good health. My lady mother and I have these past two days been guests of Sir Henry and Lady Elizabeth Wyatt of Allington

Castle, remaining there for the great celebrations of Twelfth Night which I must report was passed with great merrymaking. Yet I know that as God is my witness, I could not settle nor be at peace knowing that your Majesty resides at so great a distance. I beseech you your Majesty, never to doubt that I shall ever vary in my great love and esteem for you whilst breath is in my body.

Written by the hand of her who is in heart, body and soul, your loyal and most assured servant.

Anne Boleyn

I could imagine Henry's happiness and contentment at reading my letter. At Hever, so far away from court, and the gossip, the intrigue and the political manoeuvring for power, it was easy to forget the jaws of peril into which I daily walked and bask only in the intimacy and love which blossomed between Henry and Anne.

The weeks passed with the weather daily improving, as we

inched towards the burgeoning spring. Henry and I more frequently exchanged tokens and letters of our love and affection, until in February, when spring waited just round the corner, two important visitors arrived at Hever Castle with another message from the King.

Chapter Fourteen

Hever Castle,

February 3, 1528

By the beginning of February, the deep snow which had covered our little valley for over a month had entirely melted away. The perishing chill that unceasingly kept us in its grip had relented and given way to the dominant, warm, westerly blowing in from the Atlantic. With winter now in full retreat, I took the opportunity to go out riding on my favourite new palfrey, a magnificent and proud white mare given to me by Henry as a New Year's gift. I named her Starlight.

It was a blustery day with strong winds whipping about my skirts and snatching at the hem of my long, fur-lined cloak which stretched back over my horse's hindquarters. I loved riding and walking out on windy days and I knew that Anne,

like me, was a sensuous creature. I felt exhilarated in feeling the unseen hand of nature caressing my body and taking my breath away with her passionate kisses. I felt fully alive and tingling from the thrill of being at one with my mount, as we galloped through the woodland and across the meadows surrounding Hever. Nearing home, we slowed to a smooth, ambling gait, drinking in the windswept beauty of our surroundings on this burgeoning spring day.

As Starlight made her way along the little track back towards home, I suddenly caught sight of a small party of men on horseback arriving at the entrance to the castle, about half a mile ahead of me. I came to a halt, straining forward to see if I could make out the identity of our visitors. It was clear that they were men of note, probably from court, and they obviously travelled with purpose. Visitors were rare to our family home, so I urged my horse forward, sensing that this must be a message from Henry. By the

time I arrived, the main party had already gone inside. Only a couple of grooms remained with the horses, leading them to the stables for food, water and rest. As I reigned in Starlight to a halt, one of our servants stepped forward and helped me dismount.

A few moments later, I was entering the castle and heard voices coming from the Great Hall; whilst around me, servants bustled backwards and forwards with the usual busyness that accompanied the arrival of any important visitor. I heard my mother's strong and clear voice in dialogue with what sounded like two men in the room beyond, when suddenly Bess appeared by my side.

"Who are these men?" I asked quietly, as she laid my cloak across her arm and handed her my riding gloves and crop.

"I understand it is Drs. Stephen Gardiner and Edward Foxe come directly from court under orders from the King." Bess whispered excitedly underneath her breath.

"What do they want here, Bess?" I asked, somewhat confused by the possible nature of their business with us. As I spoke, I scoured both my memory of history, as well as my own recent dealings with the gentlemen of court, to see if I could remember any clues. It was Stephen Gardiner with whom I was most familiar at the time. In his role as Secretary to Wolsey, I watched him in dialogue many times with his master, and was also present on one or two occasions when Henry had reason to parley with him. Master Stevens – as he was commonly known at court – had impressed the King with his knowledge of both canon and civil law.

It was no secret that he was a devout Catholic and yet – much to my surprise – he seemed supportive of the King's move to annul his marriage to Katherine; and was even irritated at times by the Queen's increasing defiance of her Lord and Master. This had, of course, endeared Master Stevens into the King's good graces and I wondered if it was

in this capacity that he was now visiting Hever. However my historical knowledge of Stephen was frustratingly patchy to say the least. I couldn't remember where his loyalties lay, nor of his ultimate fate. However, I did know this much; he was an ambitious, wily and shrewd character who kept his own counsel. However, his Achilles heel was his irascibility, which – combined with his formidable intellect – made him a notoriously difficult man to deal with, and many at court kept their distance when they were able. Yet, Henry had recognised his intellectual brilliance and I noticed, even in a few short months, the King's inclination to rely increasingly on Master Stevens' council.

Edward Foxe, on the other hand, was the King's almoner. I had only ever met this gentleman in passing, and I knew even less about him. I confess that I was most eager to find out more, so when I had undressed from my outer garments and straightened my velvet skirts, I made my way into the Great Hall. When I entered, it was lit by a large, roaring

fire in front of which stood my mother talking with the two men, whose voices I had heard on entering the castle. Elizabeth Boleyn was facing the entrance to the Great Hall and when she noticed my arrival, immediately broke off her conversation to introduce me to our guests.

"Ah, Anne! Good. You have arrived back from riding out. Dr. Stephen Gardiner and Dr. Edward Foxe have come directly from the King to see you with a message from His Grace. The man who I knew to be Stephen Gardiner was the first to step forward and I noticed that he carried a letter in his hand, which I surmised was a missive from the King. Inclining his head in a gracious bow, he introduced himself,

"Mistress Anne, Dr Foxe and I have been most anxious to see you." He indicated towards his fellow travelling companion, as he too bowed courteously in my direction. I reciprocated by dipping a brief curtsey before Master Stevens continued, "We are here as your humble

servants, commanded by the King to deliver unto you this message written by his Majesty's own hand." Gardiner handed me the crisp parchment, sealed as ever with red wax and embossed with the Royal coat of arms. As I broke open the seal, Master Stevens spoke, "His Grace commands me to convey his deepest desiring for your good health, Madame."

"I thank you most kindly for your great pains on my behalf." I smiled warmly at both gentlemen. "I pray grant me leave for a moment to read the King's message, so I might better understand how I may serve you."

"Of course, Madame." As Master Stevens spoke, he gestured with his hand that I should continue reading, taking a step backwards as if to give me greater privacy to savour the words within. Unravelling the parchment, I eagerly read its contents:

To mine own sweetheart,

This letter shall be only to advertise to you that this bearer

and his fellow be despatched with as many things to compass our matter, and to bring it to pass as our wits could imagine or devise; which brought to pass, as I trust, by their diligence, it shall be shortly, you and I shall have our desired end, which should be more to my heart's ease, and more quietness to my mind, than any other thing in the world; as, with God's grace, shortly I trust shall be proved, but not so soon as I would it were; yet I will ensure you that there shall be no time lost that may be won, and further can not be done; for ultra posse non est esse. Keep him not too long with you, but desire him, for your sake, to make the more speed; for the sooner we shall have word from him, the sooner shall our matter come to pass. And thus upon trust of your short repair to London, I make an end of my letter, my own sweet heart.

Written by the hand of he who desireth as much to be yours as you do to have him.

H. R.

I appraised Henry's words, understanding immediately that the two doctors had been sent by Henry on Embassy, probably to the Pope, in his quest to seek an annulment of his marriage to Katherine. They had clearly been instructed

to stop off at Hever, and report on their mission to Anne on their way through to the Port of Dover. Yet, at the time, I did not understand from the letter the exact nature of their charge. Of course, I knew even then that they would be unsuccessful, but I was deeply inquisitive to find out more about their mission and I must confess, about the two gentlemen that stood before me - and whether or not they could be trusted.

I had a voracious appetite to learn more about each character that appeared on the stage of Anne's life. Many of the central characters, I knew from my reading of history – their words and deeds dominating historical texts. Yet, I was learning that those individuals who played supporting roles could be equally as colourful, or as deadly, in the manoeuvrings of the court - if they were ignored or underestimated. Lethal enemies and unexpected friends would be found lurking in every corner.

“Perhaps it would be more comfortable if we were to

retire to the parlour.” My mother’s voice interjected, as she led the way into the castle’s main sitting room. There my mother and I seated ourselves on stools opposite the two courtly gentlemen, whose appearances I then had the opportunity to observe.

Stephen Gardiner was probably about thirty years of age; although only a few years older than Anne, he always projected a rather austere and fatherly presence. I surmised that this was on account of his intellectual brilliance and famed mastery of the law, which made him appear rather grave and wise beyond his years. I knew that he had a reputation at court of being arrogant, and his physical appearance only emphasised this demeanour. He was above average height, with a swarthy complexion, a hooked nose, huge, deep-set, black eyes and a permanent frown. Complementing Master Stevens colouring was his thick mass of straight, black hair, dark eyebrows and since we were at almost 3 o’clock in the afternoon, that which I

recognised as the beginnings of a bristly five o'clock shadow. Overall, he was a thick-set man of coarse features; when he handed me the King's letter, I could not fail to notice his huge hands, which were now clasped loosely in his lap. Perhaps it was his reputation which preceded him, or my knowledge of his devotion to the Roman Catholic faith, but I would always find it difficult to warm to Stephen Gardiner.

However, Dr Edward Foxe was an entirely different character. I estimated that he was roughly the same age as his travelling companion, and although he said relatively little, I was struck by this gentleman's warmth and humility. Much more slight of frame and with a fair complexion, he radiated a quiet compassion and kindness. I felt that when I looked at Dr Foxe, his eyes seemed to stare back, deep into my soul, as if I were meeting an old friend; I sensed that I could trust him and I hoped that during their brief stay, I would have the chance to spend some time alone with this

man. With our visitors looking at me expectantly, I turned my attention back to the matter in hand. Addressing my question to Master Stevens, I asked, "Pray tell me Master Stevens, what is the exact nature of your Embassy? In his letter, the King makes it clear that you are tasked with bringing to bear a solution to the question of His Grace's annulment. Are you to meet with the Pope himself?"

"Indeed Madame. That is exactly so." Master Stevens replied. "As I'm sure you well know, the Pope now resides in exile – in the town of Orvieto – since the unholy sacking of Rome by the Emperor's forces earlier this year." Dr Foxe had then took up the thread of the conversation adding,

"The King's Majesty has commanded us to do all that is within our power to obtain a decretal commission from the Pope." I must have looked confused because thankfully Dr Foxe explained himself further. "A decretal commission, good lady, will lay down the principles of law which will

allow His Grace, Cardinal Wolsey, to resolve the matter directly with the Pope's representative here in England, without appeal to Rome."

"I see." I said before pausing in brief silence, attempting to make full sense of the implications of their words. Clearly, if these two gentlemen were to be successful in their task, this would simplify proceedings enormously; as who would dare dispute the facts as they were presented by the King himself in his own dominions. Cocking my head quizzically to one side, I then enquired, "But tell me gentlemen, do you foresee that your commission will be successful? Do you think that the Pope will grant this," I drew a circle in the air, gesturing as I tried to remember the correct legal terminology, "... decretal commission?"

Dr Foxe spoke first. "Madame, fear not. I will not speak on my own behalf, but I can tell you this, that Master Stevens has one of the keenest minds in the kingdom and there are a few that understand the letter of the law as he does." With

a broad and warm smile, I extended my open arms to both gentlemen and said,

"Then with my whole heart I wish you Godspeed. I know that success in your endeavour will bring both his Majesty and me the most welcome tidings and comfort of mind that it is possible to imagine." I paused, then added, "His Grace has commanded that we keep you not overly long here at Hever. However, night will soon be drawing in, and my mother and I, would be most honoured if you would sup with us this evening and be our guests here tonight."

"Ladies, it would be a pleasure and a great honour," Master Stevens replied with his usual grave solemnity. With that, my mother and I rose from our seats, followed by the two gentlemen, and with her usual efficiency, Elizabeth Boleyn then set about organising our household staff to show our guests to their rooms, where they would be able to rest and refresh themselves before dinner.

However, I was left with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I felt myself overjoyed with Henry's deep commitment towards me. It was clear that the King was mobilising every resource at his command to bring about the end of his marriage to Katherine, so that he could take Anne as his wife. Yet I knew better than anyone how long and tortuous this journey would be; how with every twist and turn, the stakes would be driven ever higher. With Henry's burgeoning passion and desire for Anne, I could not help but wonder whether, in his fantasies, he was creating a version of me – of Anne – that I could never hope to live up to, and if I did not live up to that fantasy - if I was unable to fulfil my side of the accord - then the consequences would be tragic. I wrestled with these thoughts over and over in my mind, being pulled between excitement and anticipation, fear and dread.

So, whilst our visitors retired to their rooms, I made my way up to the Long Gallery to reflect on our conversation.

Second only to the library, this was my other favourite room at Hever; light and airy, yet obligingly warm and welcoming. Whenever my father was away at court, it became my place of quiet solitude; a place where I might tuck myself away in one of its several recesses, wiling away the hours with a book, or simply staring out of its many elegant windows across the distant parkland, whilst lost in deep and reflective thought.



This is how I found myself on that February afternoon, as the sun began its rather rapid descent towards nightfall. The blustery winds continued to chase large, feathery clouds across an azure sky, which had been increasingly painted with delicate hues of pink and grey. I sat in the very same window seat that I had collapsed in on the day that I lost consciousness and crossed over into Anne's world. I had sat there on many occasions since, during my stays at Hever. It

is almost as if I was forever challenging the unfathomable powers of the universe to snatch me back to the 21st century. Yet the portal through which I had passed remained steadfastly closed; and in all truthfulness, I was not entirely disappointed; a fact which often made me feel incredibly guilty.

I leaned my forehead against the cool, smooth glass and felt the vibration of the lead-framed windows, which were being buffeted by the strong gusts of wind outside. All around me, the bricks and mortar of the castle seemed to be moving in deep, guttural groans by the force of the evermore tempestuous gales that were racing through our little valley. I did not envy our visitors their crossing of the Channel if the winds were to remain so fierce and unrelenting. I looked down into my lap to find lying open the leather-bound version of Master Tyndale's English translation of the Bible; the one which my mother had passed on to me before Christmas.

I had been drawn to study it since it came into my possession and much to my surprise, I found that it not only helped me understand the 16th century mind, but it brought me great comfort and intellectual stimulation in the many hours that I spent away from court, and from Henry. I suspect that it was Anne's genuine and deep piety which drew me ever deeper into the religious texts which she possessed; words such as faith, commitment and renewal would bring me great comfort in the incredibly trying circumstances which lay ahead. Suddenly, I heard footsteps on the oak floorboards approaching the Long Gallery, as I turned to see Dr. Edward Foxe enter the room. Out of courtesy, I made to rise from my seat, but Dr. Foxe immediately held up the palm of his hand as he spoke,

"No, no, dear lady. Please do not arise on my account."

This he said as he made his way towards me, climbing the couple of steps up to reach the large recessed area where I was sitting looking out of the window.

"Then I pray you, sir, please do take a seat," I replied, indicating that he should sit down next to me. "It will be a great pleasure for me to enjoy your learned company, for, as you might imagine, we get very few visitors here at Hever." Dr. Foxe nodded his head knowingly and smiled as if he understood how tedious the nature of my isolation might be for me – and for Anne. However, in my genuine delight at seeing Dr. Foxe – for I was intrigued to know more of this man away from the calculating stare of Master Stevens – I forgot entirely that I was holding in my hand a banned, heretical text. I did not mean to draw attention to it, but when I realised that Master Tyndale's Bible lay open in my lap, I gasped slightly, becoming flustered and quickly closing its pages. Of course, I was horrified when Dr. Foxe reached forward and took the book gently from my hands, flicking it open and scanning a number of pages, before raising his gaze to meet mine. I suspect that I looked panic-stricken, as I had expected ruthless accusations and searching questions. For the first time since my arrival in

the 16th century, I was entirely lost for words; lost to find a plausible reason that would genuinely excuse my possession of such a manuscript. Incredulously, Edward Foxe smiled once again, and leant across to hand my book back to me, and as he did so, he spoke in a hushed tone,

"Madame, you must not be afraid of me, for we share the same mind and know the truth of God's word." Still somewhat stunned, I remained silent and allowed Dr. Foxe to continue. "I must tell you Mistress Boleyn that it brings me incomparable joy to see you in possession of such a godly text." At this point, he leaned forward and in a whisper that was barely audible, he added "Madame, there are increasing numbers of us at court who are being persuaded by the new faith. Yet until now, the great men of court who have held the most influence over his Majesty – the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, Exeter, the Courteneyes and the like, have all been conservatives. With my own eyes, I see a miracle before me." He gestured towards me to indicate that that

miracle was, in fact, Anne. "Increasingly, you above all others have the King's ear. Those of us who wish with our body and soul to see the dawning of a new era in the church are looking ever more to you to be our patron. I wish to assure you, Madame, that with every fibre of my being, I will do everything that I can to resolve the King's Great Matter, so that his Majesty may take you as his true wife."

I was entirely taken aback by Edward Foxe's words. Whilst a wave of relief swept over me knowing that I was in the company of a friend, I was struck by the deep sincerity of his sentiments. I think it was at that moment I realised that this was no longer just about Anne and her love for Henry, but that many others, who themselves would become part of the reformed faith, looked to her to help bring the light to England. It was then that I completely understood the great responsibility that Anne felt, not only to her God in bringing her to this, but also to those people who prayed fervently for a new religious and social order in England. In the light of

that understanding, my fear melted away, in its place a firm and steely resolve took form, to surrender myself to God's will no matter what the consequences. Infused with a renewed sense of purpose, I nodded, holding Dr. Foxe's searching gaze as I hoped that he would see that I was worthy of this great honour. Before I had the opportunity to speak, Edward Fox spoke again. This time he took out a second book from his own pocket.

"Most virtuous and noble lady, I spoke with your father who indicated that you would wish to see this. I have carried it with me in the hope that I would find the means to deliver it to you in person." For a second time, he reached across, passing me a fine vellum-bound book, embossed with a fusion of geometrical patterns, so popular in Renaissance England. I opened the front cover to find, not for the first time that day, my breath taken away.

"The Obedience of a Christian Man, by William Tyndale." I read the title page aloud in reverent tones; I was immediately

familiar with the historical significance of this book to the future of the English Church, and to England herself. It was another of Master Tyndale's publications, smuggled into England secretly by brave men who dared to disobey the Roman Catholic Bishops' attempts to suppress the propagation of the heretical ideas promulgated by Tyndale. I knew from history that Anne's copy of this very same book would at some point in the future be stolen from her by one of Wolsey's men; no doubt with a view to incite the King's wrath against her. However, these men would once again underestimate Anne's fearless courage and the deep bond which existed between Henry and his lady.

Boldly, she would go straight to the King and not only demand its return from Wolsey - but she would also encourage the King to read it for himself. The ideas contained within it would have a profound influence on Henry's concept of kingship and the natural, subservient position of the church in England in relation to God's divinely appointed head here on Earth – Henry himself. This

book would be the seed, planted within Henry's mind, which would ultimately assist the English Reformation and the Dissolution of the English monasteries. Of course, I accepted this book from Dr Foxe, and said finally,

"I thank you kindly for this gift, which in truth, must surpass any jewel or precious thing which might be bestowed upon me. I will study it devoutly and keep it close to my heart."

With those words, Dr Edward Foxe rose from his seat and knelt before me, taking my right hand in his, he bent forward to kiss it. In time, when his King's Most Excellent Majesty would finally elevate Anne to the position of Queen Consort, such reverence would become entirely common to me. However, back then, it had a profound impact and moved me greatly.

If the King's proposal of marriage to Anne in the rose garden at Hever had been the first, private step towards her destiny, I sensed then that Anne was moving on to a

very public stage. Slowly, but surely, those courtiers loyal to her would increasingly feel confident to honour her as a future Queen. From this point forth, there would be no more hesitancy. Anne was ready to accept her role in history.

Chapter Fifteen

Windsor Castle

February 25 - 26, 1528

A few weeks later, my mother and I were making our way on horseback to join the King and court at Windsor Castle, where we were to be Henry's guests of honour; and I knew from his letters that he eagerly awaited my arrival. With the weather much improved, we set out from Hever with a small retinue of servants and a number of wagons carrying our possessions to court with us. These included my increasingly burgeoning wardrobe of fine clothes, jewels and other gifts from the King which befitted my elevated status as by then, Anne was moving in the highest echelons of England's aristocratic society.

I had been away from court for almost four months, hidden away in seclusion at Hever, whilst learned men

wrangled with the complexities that kept Henry bound in his marriage to Katherine. Frustratingly, there had been little news from doctors Gardiner and Foxe that could give cause for either of us to be merry. Having arrived in Orvieto, the two men had yet to secure an audience with Pope Clement VII. It was becoming increasingly evident that he prevaricated, whilst watching the power struggle between the armies of the France and the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. It seemed that the Pope was playing a shrewd political game. Whilst the Emperor controlled Rome, should the French army – sent to avenge the sacking of the city – fail in their endeavours, Clement would find himself ever more at the mercy of Katherine's nephew. In hindsight, the timing of Henry's pursuit of his annulment to Katherine couldn't have been worse. Had Henry sought his divorce just a couple of years earlier, the outcome for England, and for Anne, might have been very different. Without the need to please Katherine's nephew, the Pope may well have moved to grant Henry his annulment without fuss. There would have been

no need to break with the Roman Catholic Church, no dissolution of the monasteries, and perhaps no Reformation. Anne's fate may also have been very different.

That morning, we left Hever as soon as the light allowed, making our way on horseback at a goodly and steady pace across the counties of Kent and Surrey. The weather had been kind to us with little rain in the preceding weeks; the intermittent blustery winds that tenaciously gripped the southern counties of England had dried out the roads, increasing the speed at which we were able to travel. The King arranged for us to transfer to a barge at Hampton Court, the magnificent red brick Tudor palace belonging to Cardinal Wolsey that dominated the Thames near Esher. Our horses and belongings continued by road to Windsor.

Hampton Court was one of the few Tudor Royal palaces to survive in substantial form into the 21st century. I visited it often in my modern day life; indeed, I remembered it clearly from my first visit as a child. Already in awe of Tudor

history and architecture, I recall being spellbound as we approached the distinctive main Gatehouse, hardly able to contain my excitement in anticipation of exploring every nook and cranny of this, one of Henry's five original 'Great Houses'. Yet only the half of the original palace survives. In the 17th century, subsequent monarchs carried out major alterations, such that we were left with a rather peculiar building, half Tudor, half Baroque, which I personally considered an act of vandalism; the beguiling charm of the 16th century Renaissance architecture far outshining, at least in my mind, the Baroque design.

There I was, once again, approaching Wolsey's grand palace riding Starlight. As the full panorama of the building came into view, I drew her reins to a halt; my mother followed suit beside me, as we admired in awe and wonder the vast expanse of the palace as it abutted the Northern bank of the Thames. The King once famously remarked that he 'had nothing to compare with it; that is until Henry and I remodelled York Place, which would later be known as

Whitehall.

From the Great Gatehouse, through which I had passed in my 21st century life, I could see that the palace extended along the river edge for some six hundred feet or more, if you took into account the Great Court and various outbuildings which led up to its entrance. Running from left to right, and encompassed within the palace precinct, was the huge vaulted roof of the Great Hall, the large central donjon containing the main apartments of the palace; a series of walls and towers, which surrounded the Privy Garden, and finally the Watergate, which was under construction and which opened on to the Thames itself.

Towers, domes, chimneys and turrets soared upwards into the sky, completely dominating the vista and dwarfing the few wattle and daub houses nestled along the main track running by the entrance to the Palace. As we surveyed the scene in silence, Elizabeth Boleyn finally spoke,

"Oh, good Lord! Is it not truly marvellous to think that such a magnificent palace is owned by a butcher's son?" I said nothing but raised my eyebrows to convey my incredulity. My mother was referring to the Cardinal's lowly beginnings in the market town of Ipswich in Suffolk. This was always a source of much derision for the nobility, who eyed the Cardinal's enormous wealth with great envy. It was little wonder that the Roman Catholic Church in England would find itself so vulnerable to attack from its enemies, on the grounds of its excesses. Indeed, from my father's intelligence, it seemed the Cardinal was also guilty of diverting money that was rightfully the King's; all this to line his own pockets - and furnish his great houses.

After a brief conversation in which my mother and I had marvelled at Wolsey's vast wealth, we rode forward down to the banks of the Thames and to a splendid barge which awaited our arrival. We were clearly to be rowed upstream from Hampton Court towards Windsor in considerable

comfort.

With our river journey underway, we passed by ordinary country folk, those working the land, as well as merchants making their way along roads which ran alongside the banks of the Thames. Many of them paused from their labours to watch our stately progress.

Clearly, we were of some considerable interest; two elegantly dressed ladies of noble birth being rowed in a sumptuous barge by men dressed in the King's livery. I studied their weathered faces and impassive stares and wished so much to know what was in their hearts. In the fullness of time, Anne would be their Queen, although notoriously, she would never have an easy relationship with the people of England; particularly those womenfolk who resented the displacement of Katherine, a Queen who had always been held in warm affection by the common folk of the realm. As Margery Wyatt had predicted, Anne would always be judged harshly. She would be an easy target for

their resentment; for they would always live in fear of a woman who could take the King away from his rightful wife. For if the Queen of England could have her lawful husband stolen by another woman, then what did that mean for the security of their marriages? Such brazen and unscrupulous behaviour could not be tolerated.

Some twenty miles upstream, the magnificent edifice of Windsor Castle came into view. Like Hampton Court, Windsor was entirely recognisable to me; for although the interior would be greatly altered over the centuries, its external appearance would remain almost completely unchanged. Of course, in the 21st century, Windsor Castle is still a residence of the Royal family, and despite a horrific fire in my own lifetime – which extensively damaged parts of the state apartments – it had been restored with such tender loving care that it remained not only an icon of national identity, but a beloved family home. I was used to the view of

Windsor Castle in my modern day life, and was eager to drink in the scale of its original beauty with its motte and bailey design, which has been much extended and embellished by successive monarchs over several centuries. From the regal state apartments at the east end of the castle, the building extended westwards some five hundred feet or more, encompassing the elevated, central Round Tower (although oddly not as tall as I recalled) and towards its west end, the beautiful and distinctive outline of St George's Chapel. Below the castle walls, a smattering of rather elegant houses lined the grassy banks of the Thames, dwarfed by the fortifications which loomed over them. For unlike many of the other Tudor Palaces built during the 15th and 16th century, when the houses of the gentry no longer fulfilled a defensive function, Windsor Castle had been built some five hundred years earlier when fortified royal residences were vital. My mother suddenly spoke,

"This is a momentous day indeed." I turned my attention from the castle, looking over my shoulder at my mother seated next to me. She continued, "We are arriving here at Windsor Castle as guests of honour to the King of England!" The significance had not failed to pass me by either. As the King's honoured guests, I would not be expected to wait upon the Queen, as I had to endure – as Anne had to – on so many previous occasions. If Henry and I had tried to keep our relationship low-key over the winter months, my arrival at court as Henry's guest would deliver a clear and bold message of my status in the King's affections. Thankfully, as it turned out, Henry was true to his word; I would never again be one of Katherine's maids. It seemed that Anne was crossing yet another threshold; from this point forward, my own household would slowly begin to coalesce around me.

However, this was yet to come. With my mother's words, I caught sight of the landing wharf up ahead, whilst alongside

it, the Royal Standard fluttered in the breeze. My heart leapt for joy and I felt a flush of excitement race through my body; for there, mounted on a magnificent white stallion, was the King himself. As we drew closer, it was clear that Henry was accompanied by a small and select number of Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber and Council, which included: my father; my brother; Sir Henry Norris, Anne's brother-in-law, Sir William Carey, and a man I would soon come to know as Sir Thomas Cheney.

Eventually, our barge was tethered into place and as we alighted; the King swung his leg about, dismounting easily from his mighty horse. All the men who travelled with him followed his example. Once safely ashore, my mother and I dipped into a deep and graceful curtsy, keeping our eyes downcast in submission, until, without moving, I finally raised up my gaze to take in the beloved sight of my Prince. Henry was standing several metres away from us at the head of the wharf; his feet were astride, with his left hand

on his hip and his right clutching the hilt of the dagger, which was slung from his belt. In the four months that I'd been away, I had forgotten the truly awesome and fine figure struck by this mighty King. I had never seen Henry look so magnificent and indeed, so radiant. He was dressed in a cap of black velvet; the brim looped up all around with lacets and enamelled gold aiglettes. Whilst upon his body, the King wore a doublet of the finest white cloth of gold, the fabric slashed to show the lightest of white, silk fabric puffs, each decorated top and bottom with an exquisite jewel. His hose naturally matched his doublet, whilst over both of these, came a white silk and satin, knee-length jerkin; this was richly trimmed with a deep red binding around its "U" shaped neckline. Finally, to complete this spectacle of Majesty, the King carried upon his broad shoulders a fabulous gown fashioned from purple velvet, lined in white satin, and trimmed with expensive, white ermine fur. However, despite all of these hugely expensive fabrics, it was the jewellery which Henry wore which took one's breath

away and caused him to literally sparkle in the sunlight. Around his neck he wore a gold collar from which hung a rough-cut diamond. I swear that this diamond was the size of the largest walnut that I have ever seen! Yet this was not all, for also draped across his gown was a very handsome gold collar with a pendant of St George made entirely of diamonds. Furthermore beneath his mantle was a pouch of cloth of gold, and as always, Henry's fingers were one mass of jewelled rings.

The King's Grace had been thirstily drinking in my appearance, before throwing his arms open wide. I could see that with every fibre of his being, he wanted to hold me once more. I raised myself up and ran forward, meeting Henry part way along the wharf, as he too moved forward equally quickly and eagerly. With an explosion of passion and an outpouring of relief to be together once again, we fell into each other's arms; Henry catching me up effortlessly and swinging me around with great jubilation, smiles and

many kisses.

"Anne, my sweetheart," Henry whispered into my ear, "I have prayed to God daily to see and hold you again. It is marvellous to mine eyes to behold your face which is more precious to me, more exquisitely beautiful, than anything that I own."

"Your Majesty, Henry, is it possible to put into words the great pain of being without the one you love, without the light of your Majesty's presence which is so dear to mine own heart? Four months has felt like four years!" I groaned, burying myself against Henry's massive torso. In turn, he held me tight within his arms. Although, I was perhaps slightly above average height for a woman, I was still such a slight thing in comparison with Henry's impressive physique. At 6'2", the King was just a shade under a foot above my diminutive

5'3" stature and I was always dwarfed in his presence; indeed, there were only a few gentlemen, such as Charles

Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, who were literally able to look Henry in the eye. Keeping his arm around me, Henry addressed my mother who remained unmoved in her deep curtsy.

"Lady Elizabeth, please rise!" Henry gestured with one hand that my mother should straighten herself once more.

"We cannot thank you enough Madame, for keeping this jewel of womanhood safe from harm and returning her to me. We owe you a debt of gratitude." The King spoke with great lightness in his voice, before continuing, "Let us repair to our Privy Chambers for We have ordered a sumptuous dinner be prepared to celebrate our good fortune and honour you, Madame." With that, Henry took my hand, and kissed it gently. Then, calling out more loudly to my father, who had been waiting patiently on the riverbank with the other gentlemen of the court, the King said, "Lord Rochford! Your most precious daughter is returned to us and We are in the mood to celebrate!" The King slipped his arm about my waist as we walked down the wharf

towards the rest of the King's party. Greeting them, I kissed my father and brother lightly on the cheek and paid reverence to my brother -in-law, Sir Henry and Sir Thomas, before our party remounted our horses and made our way towards the castle.



Before supper, my family and I visited our apartments to change and prepare for the evening ahead. As guests of honour, the rooms which had been allocated to us were more sumptuous and grander than those in which our family – and Anne – had been previously housed – at either Richmond or Greenwich. Followed by my parents and my brother, a gentleman usher of the King's household led us to a series of interconnecting rooms; the suite comprised a great parlour, which in turn led into a smaller, so called, 'little parlour'. This room had two further doorways leading from it, the first was to a sumptuous and cosy bedroom

hung with deep and rich fabrics and tapestries, whilst the other opened up into a small, private closet, or chapel. What I had not expected, was that these lodgings were reserved only for my use. My father informed me that unlike my time spent with Henry the previous year, my parents and my brother were to be lodged in separate apartments for the duration of our stay. Along with the usher allocated to me, Bess would also remain with me as my maid.

After a brief exchange of words and greetings away from the public gaze, my father, mother and brother left me to explore my new domain. As the door closed behind them, I found myself in silence; staring in wonder at my surroundings. I could not believe that I was so blessed to behold these beautiful rooms and their many ornate treasures - and to witness, first- hand, another moment of triumph for Anne. All the walls were covered in the finest linenfold oak panelling; in the main parlour, beautiful mullioned windows made for a light and airy space, kept warm by the large open fire already lit and awaiting my arrival. I was

busily enjoying the delights of that fine accommodation, when suddenly, there was a knock at the door. This time, the usher announced the arrival of two women whom I had much longed to see – Anne Gainsford and Mary Norris. We all managed to maintain our composure until the usher left the room and closed the door behind him. Then with gales of excited squeals and laughter, we fell into each other's arms, barely able to contain our enthusiasm for seeing each other again. When our first flush of heady exhilaration had passed, my friends broke away from me and each dipped into a curtsy. I looked at them quizzically, and then Nan spoke up,

"Anne, we have been commanded by the King to wait upon you." I had forgotten all about this! In my excitement to see the King again, it had entirely slipped my mind that Henry had promised me my own small household upon my return to court. I then comprehended fully the extent to which I was being honoured; my own suite of rooms, and my dear friends to wait upon me and be my constant companions.

Nan then said, "Anne, look at these beautiful rooms!" Looking about the room in awe, she added, "Nought but the highest in the land could expect to be lodged in such splendour...and now you have your own household – just think of it!" Indeed, I had been thinking on it! Then Mary said with similar exuberance,

"Oh Anne! We are so happy that you have finally returned to court." She turned to nod towards Nan in order to gain her affirmation. With much exaggerated groaning and rolling of eyes, she explained, "You can't imagine how tediously boring it has been since you left. The King and Queen have been much vexed with each other! We have never seen the Queen so surly and so deeply aggrieved. She has become increasingly fractious, particularly towards us, whom she knows to be your dear and most loyal friends." Nan nodded vigorously in agreement. I felt sorry for them, and guilty, for they had suffered Katherine's wrath in my absence – and all on my behalf. Then with great sincerity, Nan added,

"We are so happy to be here, Anne, and pledge to serve you with all honour and faithfulness." I must admit that in those early days, I found it uncomfortable to have my friends act so deferentially toward me. Yet, I understood that in the rigidly defined hierarchy of Tudor society, this deference was as natural to them as breathing; I also knew in my heart that they were truly honoured and excited to be the first among Anne Boleyn's household.

I was soon to learn that this was not the only delightful surprise which awaited me that day; soon, I was to be unexpectedly reunited with another of my dear friends.



As I stood naked in front of the fire within my Privy Chamber, I could just see through a chink in the rich, satin curtains, the last light of the day fading rapidly. A costly – and indeed, a very rare clock, which was set upon an oak

sideboard, told me that it was shortly after five o'clock in the afternoon. Nan and Mary were preparing me to sup with the King. I had chosen an exquisite gown, and both my friends busied themselves helping me dress. Of course by now, I was much accustomed to the many intricacies of the clothes that I daily wore, and I must confess that I have always adored the sweeping grace and elegance that these garments seemed to ennoble within me. Compared to the jeans and T-shirts, which were my usual fare in my modern day life, I always felt sexy and exquisitely feminine in my 16th century attire.

As I was being dressed by my friends, we chatted, catching up on the comings and goings of court. All the while, I took note of each layer as it was sculpted around me to produce the final, stunning effect. Having initially helped me into my stockings, the first layer of clothing which Nan and Mary slipped over my head was a loose fitting, calf-length, linen smock with blackwork edging around the neckline and

frilled cuffs. This garment was worn next to my skin and as they adjusted it about my body, I asked a question that had been playing on mind since my friends first appeared in my apartments, "Where is Joan?" Mary was the first to reply,

"She is pregnant again, Madame, and sadly has been having a difficult time with much sickness."

"Oh, poor girl!" I exclaimed. I was genuinely concerned, for like my other friends, I always held Joan in deep affection. I had learned a lot about Mistress Champernowe during our time together. In 1527, she was twenty-three years of age and a little younger than Anne; she originally came to court from the family home in Devon to serve Queen Katherine as a maid of honour. During those years, she met the up-and-coming courtier, Anthony Denny, who was already in the King's service. Denny had been introduced to the King through my distant cousin, Sir Francis Bryan; these two men had quickly become firm friends and Sir

Francis had strongly promoted Master Denny's interests. It was clear that the King liked this new man at court and Sir Anthony, as he was later to become, was destined for great things. I remember that his name was one of those that was deeply familiar to me from my reading of history. Yet frustratingly, he was also one of those characters about whom the details of their career, allegiances and friendships remained particularly elusive. Since my time in Anne's world, I had gleaned that Denny was an evangelical and that Joan, like her husband, was also of the reformed faith. On account of this, both of them had fitted in well with Anne's circle of friends and the increasingly prominent Boleyn faction. Joan married Sir Anthony in 1525 and by the time I knew her, was already a very proud mother of a daughter, Honora who was born at their house in Cheshunt, the following year.

"Madame?" Mary's voice cut through my own, deep thoughts; I failed to notice that both Nan and Mary were

holding up the next layer of my gown. This was a red silk, padded skirt which reached down to my ankles, supported by a very minimal bodice and cut into a deep U- shaped at the front and a similarly deep 'V' at the back. I had learnt that it was this layer that principally gave the volume and movement to a ladies gown. I stepped into it, allowing Mary to tie it into place as I asked,

"Is she at home? Who is looking after her?" Mary picked up the next layer which was a kirtle, a sleeveless garment made of white silk and bejewelled round its square-cut neckline. Slipping it over my head with Nan's assistance, she answered,

"Yes, Madame. She's at home in Cheshunt and I believe that her cousin, Kat, is visiting and attending her."

Kat Champernowe is a name that I knew well. When Joan first mentioned her cousin, I had struggled for a moment to understand why her name was so familiar, and why it had filled me with such warmth. Of course, I soon realised that

Mistress Kat would later become the loyal and long-serving governess to my daughter, Elizabeth. Even before my daughter was born, I always felt that I owed her a tremendous debt of gratitude of which she could never know, and of which I could never express; I must confess that I longed to meet her. As I mused on this, Mary laced my kirtle into place down the back of the garment; this had the effect of raising up my rather small, pert breasts in the manner which I knew Henry much admired. Yet I felt that without Joan, our little circle of friends was not complete, so I asked,

"When do you expect her to return to court?"

"Sir Anthony told me just a few days ago that the worst of her sickness seemed to be over and that Joan hopes to be back at court in the next few weeks," Nan replied, as she straightened my skirts.. I looked down to admire the sumptuous material from which the kirtle was made. For that momentous evening, I chose a blue cloth of silver to

contrast against the bodice and skirt, which was fashioned from plain cloth of silver and edged with a silk welt of the same colour; all of which was a gift from the King. Still thinking about Joan, I said almost to myself, "I'm glad of it" but before I could say more, my ladies presented my gown, the outer layer of my dress, into which I stepped obligingly. Nan laced the bodice snugly around Anne's slender body, before covering the lacing up the front of my gown with a stomacher, which was pinned along the left and right sides of my torso. In the meantime, Mary began the process of turning back and stitching into place the wide cuffs which were fashionably close-fitting round the upper arm and flared below. These were always lined with a costly fabric; on this occasion with miniver – a rich, white fur – which also lined the train of my skirt. In order to show off the cut of the French gown to best effect, I had come to understand that this outer skirt was always gathered in generous folds, concentrated at the back of the waist. I cast a glance over my shoulder, half twisting to see the train

of my gown extended away behind me in a long trail.

As Nan laced the false foresleeves into place just above my elbow, Mary brought out my casket of jewellery, which had accompanied me from Hever. By that time, its contents had swollen considerably with the King's most generous bounty. For my debut at Windsor, I picked out two necklaces, one a choker, the other much longer, which when worn dipped down below the neckline. These were made from gold, set with clusters of pearls, sapphires and diamonds and matched the jewellery sewn around the neckline of my kirtle, the girdle which had been clipped around my waist, and finally, the billaments sewn around the edge of my French hood. The finishing touches were then put into place; the addition of numerous rings to my delicate fingers, the pinning of a diamond and sapphire brooch, decorated with three pearl droplets, to the front of my gown, and the placing of the hood upon my head. At last, I stood back to admire my friend's handiwork. Anne

famously was no beauty, the antithesis of the fair skinned, blond haired, blue-eyed epitome of feminine looks so admired in the Tudor age; but she was utterly stunning and her presence beguiling. I knew that on that special evening, the King would not be disappointed with her.



A little after six o'clock, accompanied by my two ladies, I made my way to the King's Privy Chamber, where a private feast had been prepared to honour Anne's return to court. For the first time, I was to approach the doors of the King's Privy Apartments in full view of the court and with no sense of shame. The King had tired of pretence and wished to show me off to all his courtiers. Thus, with a great swishing of skirts, our little party proudly swept through the King's Presence Chamber at Windsor; many faces, some familiar and some new, acknowledged Anne's presence as courtesy dictated. There was no doubt that there

was great curiosity and acknowledgement of the obviously elevated status of Mistress Anne, who was now attended by two women of gentle birth.

The passage from my Privy lodgings had taken me through the vast Great Hall and equally magnificent Watching Chamber, before turning left to pass through the thirty metre long, King's Presence Chamber. Eventually, I arrived at the doors to Henry's private apartments. In the room beyond, which was the King's main sitting room, a huge, sturdy oak table dominated the centre of the room and was bedecked with silver gilt plate laid out for supper. The fire, which had been alight all day, had now died back to red-hot, glowing embers, casting a warm glow across the faces of those men and women already in the company of the King. I was slightly taken aback, for I had expected a relatively small, intimate gathering; a low-key affair to celebrate Anne's arrival at court. Thankfully, I had to pause briefly in the doorway whilst I awaited my announcement.

It gave me a chance to catch my breath, for clearly Henry intended to celebrate in style and the room was abuzz with thirty or more of the most prominent nobles, gentlemen and ladies in the land. Many, although sadly not all, of those invited had shown themselves as supporters of Anne.

I caught a glimpse of Henry; one arm leaning against the mantle of the huge stone fireplace, the other arm gesturing as he talked with great energy and humour to those around him. I recognised that standing in the closest proximity to the King were: the Duke of Norfolk, my father and mother, my brother George and his wife Jane, and Sir William Carey, one of the King's Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber. Unfortunately, his wife, my sister Mary, was not present, and I wondered if she was at their country estate, or whether, due to the awkwardness of the situation, she had simply not been invited.

"Mistress Anne Boleyn, Your Grace!" the deep and resonant

voice of the King's usher proclaimed aloud. Henry looked up immediately and broke into a broad smile, as he spoke loudly and effusively, causing all the assembled courtiers to look in my direction,

"Mistress Anne, at last! We have been long awaiting your presence!" He laughed with great mirth, gesturing for me to come over. As I moved forward, the wider circle of Henry's dinner guests made way for me to join Henry's side. Having dipped into a deep curtsy, I rose and Henry placed his arm around my waist, kissing me on the lips. Audible only to my family, who were gathered around him, Henry then asked me, "Pray tell me sweetheart, how dost thou like my gift to you?" Henry beamed as he glanced towards Nan and Mary who were standing close behind me in attendance. I too broke into a radiant smile for I could not hide the joy that was in my heart, not only to be reunited with my friends, but to know that I would never have to wait upon the Queen again. When I spoke, my words conveyed my deep sincerity

and gratitude.

"I am deeply touched, honoured and grateful to Your Grace for such a precious gift. I marvel at how such a humble a girl like me could be worthy of such bounty from so mighty a King; the likes of which I am sure I will never be able to repay you." Henry chuckled and said, "Now, my love, I have another surprise for you." All around, the wider circle of dinner guests discreetly continued their private conversations.

"Another surprise?" My face must have shown a bemused mixture of confusion, delight and incredulity that there could possibly be more. I looked between the faces of my mother, father and brother, who were all smiling at me; they clearly shared in Henry's mischief.

"Lady Lee, please come forward and join us." It seemed that Henry had been planning this moment, a special surprise for his lady; it was to be the crowning glory to an otherwise perfect day. Through a nearby doorway, from

beyond Henry's Privy Chamber, my dear friend Margery appeared. I could not believe my eyes! With sheer delight I ran forward and we embraced each other with great joy. For a few moments, I could hardly speak from shock and disbelief. Henry then said, "Lady Lee has come back to court and I have granted her leave to attend upon you. How like you this, sweetheart?" Finally, I found my voice again.

"Your Grace, I am undeserving of such great honour and of such boundless generosity. I am forever your most humble servant." I was always aware that I had to maintain a degree of formality with the King in the presence of others; even if the 'others' were intimate family members. Henry's eyes were alight with love and admiration. So happy was I in that moment that I must have lit up with the sparkle of a thousand diamonds. It was clear that Henry wanted to give me the world.

Addressing the assembled dinner guests, the King announced loudly, "We find, ladies and gentlemen, that this

day has given us a hearty appetite. Let us eat!" With that, we took our places; I at the right hand of the King, his guest of honour, the most privileged position.

The supper that Henry had ordered to honour Anne was sumptuous indeed. We were served with a fantastic array of different meats including; beef, veal, bacon, kid goats, coneys (which by now I knew was the Tudor term for a rabbit), calves, and lamb, as well as a variety of unusual birds including plovers, larks and pipers. Dressing the centrepiece of the table was a magnificent swan which had been stuffed for our amusement and consumption, along with two splendid, model galleons made from marchpane and covered entirely with edible gold leaf. By this time, I was more than a little used to the excesses of Henry's court. Yet as we were served with a seemingly never ending array of dishes, I could not help but be astonished by the unceasing abundance laid before us. Ale, beer and fine French Gascon wine flowed through the evening, along

with merry conversation and much laughter. Henry was in great spirits – as ever he was when Anne was by his side. Yes, life was sweet indeed then. Nothing, and no one, could eclipse the King's love for Mistress Boleyn. Unfortunately, I knew the painful truth for myself, that Henry's love would always be conditional; conditions which I knew, even then, were ultimately beyond Anne's control.



After we had all supped, our party followed the King through into the Presence Chamber where a large number of courtiers had already assembled in anticipation of the King's arrival. Henry made it known that there would be much dancing and merrymaking that evening. So, when we arrived into this substantial and most elegant room, there was a lively atmosphere underscored by a frisson of excitement. Henry's nobles were ever keen to weigh up a new power base at court; the ever-changing and shifting sands of court

faction keeping everyone on their toes. Before long there was more laughter, storytelling and good humour coming from the King, which soon spread infectiously around the room. By the soft light of so many candles and torches, the court musicians serenaded us, and our high spirits made for much energetic dancing. As ever, Henry only had eyes for me, as a web of delicious sexual tension spun around us and we flirted outrageously with each other; the rest of the world seemed to melt away for a few glorious hours.

Sometime later, with the King in hearty discussion with some of the most intimate members of his Privy Chamber, I found myself, more than a little intoxicated and alone with my father. Yet despite this, I noticed that my brother was in deep discussion with a gentleman that I recognised had attended upon the King when he met my mother and me upon arrival at Windsor. Taking another sip of the delicious, full-bodied, red wine from my glass goblet, I turned to my father, and pointing toward George, who stood

in one of the two large, recessed windows overlooking a central, inner courtyard below asked,

"Father, who is the gentleman talking with George?" I cocked my head to the side quizzically, noticing how the room seemed to move along with my head. I mused on just how much I would regret drinking so much of this strong wine in the morning when, no doubt, I was to ride out hunting with the King. My father turned to follow my gaze before speaking,

"Sir Thomas Cheney. He is a distant cousin of yours, through my aunt Isabella. Unfortunately, Sir Thomas finds himself in a rather delicate situation. Swaying slightly, I enquired about this "delicate situation".

"Sir Thomas is seeking the wardship of a young lady by the name of Anne Broughton, the stepdaughter of Sir John Russell. Wolsey already has granted to him the wardship of her younger sister, Katherine. Yet, I believe that Sir John is

now petitioning the Cardinal to sell Katherine's wardship back to the family and have Anne declared of age." I must confess that it took me a few moments to make all the links between the often complex web of family connections that existed at court. I knew that my father could see Anne's sharp – if rather inebriated – mind at work and so he went on, "I believe Sir Thomas is keen to have your patronage, and wonders if, in return for his allegiance and loyalty, we might somehow..." My father paused for a moment looking for the most appropriate word, "encourage Cardinal Wolsey to promote the granting of Anne's wardship to Sir Thomas." I nodded silently taking in the ramifications of what my father was suggesting before I spoke again,

"Perhaps we should invite one of Wolsey's men to dine with me? If we tread carefully with the Cardinal and extend our good graces towards him, we might persuade him to think kindly upon the matter?" My father smiled at me; one of his wry smiles, which he always reserved for those moments in which he clearly appreciated Anne's innate

and astute political awareness. He continued,

"I think Master Thomas Heneage may be our man. He is just about to be transferred from Wolsey's household to the King's Privy Chamber. An extremely agreeable character, who I believe is also held in considerable esteem by the Cardinal." My father paused for a moment as if considering all the options before he spoke, "I shall see if I can arrange it so that you have the opportunity to invite him to sup with us in your apartments - perhaps on Tuesday evening." I nodded silently in agreement, adding,

"Please convey to Sir Thomas my deepest appreciation for his goodwill and service, and that I shall ever try to be a good and loyal patron unto him."

Later that evening, as I made my way back to my privy apartments accompanied by my ladies, I mused with some wonder that Anne Boleyn had collected her first 'client' at

court. Perhaps it was the wine speaking, but I felt provocative and alluring and I was now ready to flex my feminine guiles to reel in the Cardinal.



The next morning, the King requested that I accompany him hunting in the surrounding Windsor Forest. I needed no encouragement and throwing back the covers, helped by Nan and Mary, I busily set about selecting my riding attire - a sumptuous gown of crimson velvet. A couple of hours later, having broken my fast and attended mass, I awaited the King's arrival with a small party of his closest companions who had been selected to accompany the King and his lady. This household would, in the weeks ahead, consist of Sir William Compton, Sir Henry Norris, Sir William Carey – particularly skilled horsemen - my brother George, one of my ladies and sometimes my father, or the

Duke of Suffolk – if state business allowed. Thus, a little after nine o'clock, our party assembled in the small courtyard in the north-west corner of the upper ward of the castle; a place known as Engine Court, which faced part of the King's most private apartments to the North, and the Queen's to the East. As ever, we were to be accompanied by a number of mounted guards and foot soldiers. There was the usual hubbub associated with the coming together of a hunting party; the clatter of horses' hooves on the cobblestones, the whinnying of our palfreys eager to be off, and the shouts of servants as they prepared themselves with all that we might need for refreshment during the day ahead; for it was not uncommon for us to return late in the afternoon, as the light was fading.

Suddenly, the King appeared at the foot of his privy stairs accompanied by the charming and polished Sir Henry Norris. Sweeping towards me with a broad smile he said heartily,

"Good morning, sweetheart. I trust that you are well rested?"

Henry put his arm around my waist briefly, before drawing me in close to him and kissing me lovingly on the lips.

"Indeed, Sire. I find myself in exceptionally good spirits!" I replied coquettishly. I was to ride pillion with Henry which I adored. He swung himself up onto his magnificent mount with ease; as would a man half his age. Using black, velvet covered steps, I was assisted to sit up behind him. As usual, I slipped my arms around his waist, resting my cheek against his broad shoulders and noticing the familiar excitement that arose within me when I found my body so close to his. As Henry lifted his arm and indicated that our party should depart, I momentarily glanced upwards towards the windows of the Queen's Privy Chamber. Unexpectedly, I found my gaze locked with that of the Queen who, unbeknownst to me, had been standing watching us as we awaited his Majesty's arrival. It was a moment shared only between two women who were locked in a vicious and

deadly battle for the love of one man. Katherine looked down on me imperiously with a fury in her eyes that she saved only for Anne. As we galloped off through the Norman Gateway, I thought nothing more of the incident until the following day when, quite unexpectedly, I encountered the Queen.



I was just leaving the Chapel after Prime when the Queen emerged through a nearby doorway leading directly from the Queen's Watching Chamber. Katherine was on her way to her private prayer. Much to my dismay, we were upon each other before I had any opportunity to slip away in the opposite direction. I could not avoid facing her. Katherine of course, was followed by a number of her ladies of the Privy Chamber, all of whom I knew well. Margery, thank God, was by my side, her usual pillar of strength. As the Queen approached, she halted just a few short steps away

from where I was standing. The adrenaline that was coursing through my body made my heart pound against my chest wall.

I was cross that Katherine could still provoke such a reaction in me, and I prayed to God that she could not see my discomfort. There we stood, facing each other for the first time since it had become widespread knowledge at court that the King was seeking to put aside his wife. Of course, she held me entirely responsible. For moments that seemed to stretch into minutes, a profound silence filled the corridor. It was as if nobody dared even breathe. Katherine, by her right and rank, spoke first and made no attempt to hide her contempt for me.

"So, Mistress Boleyn, I see that you seek to have it all now." She moved even closer toward me until we were only inches apart. "You are no longer content to be just a common whore, now you think to raise yourself far beyond your status and take the King away from his true and loyal wife."

At that moment, something primitive stirred within me. I was gripped by the gathering storm of my indignation; suddenly all fear melted away. With our gaze firmly locked, a long, silent battle of wills ensued. I felt anger mount at having my honour so publicly slighted. I no longer cared whether this woman was the Queen of England or a kitchen maid, and when I finally spoke, I matched Katherine's hushed and even tone, yet now there was danger in my voice.

"Madam, as for the first, I am a maid, as pure as the day I was born. I have, and shall keep my maidenhead to give into the hands of my future husband – *whomever* he may be. As for the latter, I have not taken anything away from you. The King in his Majesty realises that his bed is now cold," I looked at Katherine disparagingly, as if to emphasise how much she had clearly let herself go. "And he seeks to find a more fertile one elsewhere." By then, I was standing tall,

my chin lifted and my head held high. As I glared at Katherine, I noticed a flush of scarlet well up from her breast. Her face flushed with anger, which she struggled to contain. I know by right I should have stepped aside to let her pass, but I was, by that time, beyond myself in my own fury.

With the most minimal gesture of deferential respect required by court etiquette, I inclined my head made the smallest of curtsies, before gathering up my skirts, as I said, "Good day, Your Grace." I could not hold back the sarcasm in my voice and I did not wait to see the Queen's full indignation. In a flurry of ire, I turned my back on her and her ladies and headed back toward my own chambers with Margery following behind me. I would never again be intimidated by Katherine as I knew the balance of power was now in Anne's favour. What I did not know was that in this strange and unfathomable drama, I would never see Katherine again.

Chapter Sixteen

Windsor Castle

March 3, 1528

A few days later, I found myself pacing around my apartment in a somewhat anxious state. I was about to entertain one of Wolsey's men in an attempt to woo the Cardinal to support my client, Sir Thomas Cheney, to take control of the wardship of Mistress Anne Broughton. Although I was unsure how to proceed in the matter, I knew that I would need all of Anne's charm, flair and diplomacy to inveigle myself into the Cardinal's good graces. I also knew that my father had delicately broached the matter with the King earlier that day. Later that morning, as Henry and I walked in Windsor Great Park, I took my opportunity to influence the King. It was not a difficult task. We had spent the morning as two lovers alone, accompanied only at a discreet distance by Henry's bodyguard; my

mother and Margery acting as chaperones. The two of us meandered arm in arm through the first flush of daffodils, which were bursting into flower, announcing the arrival of spring with a great fanfare of yellow blossom.

The King was in a particularly loving and affectionate mood, and I spoke openly of Sir Thomas Cheney's difficulties and my intention to invite Master Heneage to sup with me in order to influence the Cardinal. I believe so entranced was Henry with his desire for me, that in that moment he would have given me his kingdom had I asked it of him. It was, therefore, no surprise to me that the King sympathised with Sir Thomas's plight and offered to send Master Heneage to my apartments that evening with a special dish prepared for our meal.

Yet I was not yet finished. I found that Anne had a natural flair for playing the game of court politics, and although I had been in Anne's world for only nine months, I was no

longer a novice either; indeed, the two of us had begun to emerge as a formidable force. Thus, when Henry and I returned to the castle shortly after midday, I dined alone with the King, and most conveniently, Thomas Heneage was one of the Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber who waited upon us. As Sir Thomas lent over to refill our goblets of wine, I said boldly to the His Majesty that I felt somewhat aggrieved that the Cardinal had been neglecting me of late. This was all that I needed to do, as I knew that this message would be most swiftly conveyed back to His Grace, the Cardinal, who prided himself on having eyes and ears everywhere at court; I was beginning to understand that if one was shrewd and of great wit, the potential deadly web of relationships and allegiances at court could be made to work in one's favour.

And so it had come about that I was to dine with Master Heneage alone, attended by Margery and Nan, and a gentleman usher. Contemplating the evening ahead, I stared

out of one of the two large windows in the main parlour of my privy rooms. I could make out the outline of Windsor Forest in the distance, softly illuminated in the final shards of daylight. On the edge of the forest, I followed the movements of a magnificent white stag until, like a ghost, it melted into the shadows. Only then was I aware of the crisp parchment that I had been turning over and over in my hands. Opening it, I read the letter once more.

Most gracious lady,

I write to you at this time to understand of your good health and prosperity, whereof to know I would be glad as in manner mine own. I find myself much troubled lest you might have cause to be aggrieved at my rather rough wooing of matters which touch you greatly. I beseech you, good lady think nought but the best of me that I shall not desist until I have brought to pass a favourable solution to his Grace's present difficulties. If it pleases God, I swear that I will

*ever vary from these toils whilst breath remains in my body.
I am and will remain your most loyal and committed servant,
esteeming you, next to the King, above all others,
T. CAR^{LIS} EBOR.*

My display of displeasure concerning Wolsey's lack of attention toward me at dinner had elicited the intended result. The letter that I received just an hour or so ago was written in Wolsey's own compact and tidy hand. I scanned the handwriting again and felt the tension etch into the very fabric of the paper. I could imagine the Cardinal, hunched over his desk, composing these reluctant and empty words of affection to the King's Lady.

I tapped the edge of the parchment rather absentmindedly against my chin as I reflected on its message and the political game-playing that was undoubtedly afoot. I knew that the Cardinal was no fool and by now understood well the danger that Anne represented to him. It was clear to me and to many people at court that he had been back-footed by

Anne Boleyn's sudden ascendancy. I also knew that when Henry inherited the English throne after the death of his father in 1509, the Cardinal had rapidly and cleverly made himself utterly indispensable to Henry; he had taken from the young, energetic King the heavy burden of state business, allowing Henry to indulge in his favourite pastimes of hunting, hawking, jousting, dancing and making merry. Yet Wolsey had grown intolerably arrogant and vain, wielding, largely unchallenged, the power behind the throne. No one, not least a woman, had ever seriously threatened his dominance at court. As a result, quite simply the Cardinal had not seen Anne coming, and I imagined that he was now furious with himself for his great laxity and short-sightedness. There was no doubt that by March 1528, Wolsey was playing catch up. I could see that from the letter I had received that he was seeking to obtain the Mistress Boleyn's favour; yet, of course, history taught me to doubt the sincerity of his intentions. But for the present at least, Anne and Wolsey shared a common agenda. And so, I

decided to make the most of it to obtain the Cardinal's support, both for Anne's sake in the matter of the King's annulment, and to obtain a favourable result for Sir Thomas Cheney.

As I turned my back on the window, laying the letter down upon a nearby sideboard, there was a knock at the door. I nodded to Bess to let in Master Heneage, who presented himself to me with a great flourish of courtly deference.

“Madame, the King has sent me forthwith with food for your table and music for your pastime,” he said making a deep and graceful bow. I was delighted to see that Henry also sent along one of his personal musicians, a lutenist, to help make the evening's conversation more convivial. I had liked Thomas Heneage from the very beginning. He was ever a kind and courteous man; softly spoken and generous in spirit. So, having made the required reverence of a simply curtsy, I smiled at him as I spoke.

"Master Heneage, I thank you right kindly for conveying to me His Grace's gifts." As Master Heneage straightened himself, I invited him to join me at my table as I went on, "It would bring me great pleasure if you were to sup with me this evening. As you can see," I said as I looked about the room, "I am dining alone and your company would be most welcome."

"You do me a great honour, Mistress Boleyn and I most graciously accept," Thomas replied magnanimously. I knew that Master Heneage had been alerted to my intentions and would understand all too well that the great honour that I bestowed upon him was not for his benefit, but rather so I might forge a deeper friendship with his most recent master. I also realised with some conceit, just how artfully I had manipulated three men in just one day: the King, the Cardinal and my dinner guest. Yet, this was always Anne's world; a world where the rules of court faction and politics dominated over play, and I was beginning to understand

what an engrossing game it could be.

Soon, by the light of the fire and the warm glow of several beeswax candles placed around the room, Master Heneage and I were served generously on silver plate with several fine dishes; our food being accompanied by ale poured into silver goblets, and watered down wine, into the finest Venetian glass. Thankfully, the wine eased the polite conversation, whilst the lute worked its charm; lulling our senses with sweet and gentle melodies. Finally, I found myself finally alighting on the subject of the Cardinal.

"I received a letter from His Grace, Cardinal Wolsey this afternoon. I know that you know His Grace well and I would be much in your debt, Master Heneage, if you could thank the good Cardinal for his kind and favourable writing unto me," I proffered as I broke the bread before us.

"Of course, Madame, it would be my pleasure," Thomas said softly as he raised his goblet to take a delicate swig of ale.

"It is the first day of Lent today, is it not? I hear that the Cardinal has some very fine fishponds at his disposal at Hampton Court." Somewhat emboldened by the wine, I went on, "I think it would be pleasant, would it not, if His Grace might send me some of his carp for the table?" I did not know if I had overstepped the mark, but Thomas Heneage's expression remained polite, if not a little impassive. Undeterred, I pressed on toward the heart of the matter, "I also understand that there are some...difficulties...with regard to a rather delicate situation that has arisen between Sir Thomas Cheney and Sir John Russell." It was time for Master Heneage to pause, putting down his knife and looking slightly perplexed for a moment, before an expression of recognition finally passed across his face and he nodded, saying, "Ah! You refer to the wardship of Sir John's stepdaughters?"

"Indeed." I said earnestly. "I understand that the matter has

caused some considerable consternation for all parties, but I would find it most agreeable if His Grace would both forgive and support Sir Thomas in obtaining the wardship of Mistress Anne." My eyes flicked up to meet Margery's gaze as she stood by silently in attendance. I was heartened enormously to see her nod, almost imperceptibly, in support. Finishing the food before him, Master Heneage sat back in his chair, hesitating briefly, before he said,

"I will convey your concerns to His Grace, Madame. I am sure that he will give the matter all the weight and consideration it deserves." I wasn't entirely sure if this was a favourable outcome or merely a noncommittal statement meant to placate me. However, I felt that I could do no more. Master Thomas and I passed the rest of the evening in gentle conversation until, with our supper drawing to a close, I bid my dinner guest good night. As the door closed behind him, I breathed a sigh of relief. I was exhausted and longed only for sweet dreams to rock me

asleep. Having been stripped of my clothes by Margery and Bess, I sank wearily into my bed.

Chapter Seventeen

Windsor Castle

March 28, 1528

A little over three weeks had passed since I dined with Thomas Heneage. Much to my relief, my first, tentative steps in the fraught dealings of court politics seemed to have gone well. Wolsey acquiesced to my humble request that Sir Thomas be forgiven for his transgressions and supported his petition for Mistress Anne's wardship. The matter had yet to be fully resolved with the girl's family, but the King openly supported Cheney's proposal and for the time being at least, a truce of sorts seemed to have broken out between Sir Thomas and Sir John Russell, stepfather to Mistress Anne. Furthermore, if Wolsey had until this point been ignoring me, I now found myself never far from His Grace's thoughts. The sporadic and rather cursory notes that I previously received from the Cardinal had now become a

regular flow of effusive letters and gifts, enquiring about my health and commending His Grace unto me. That morning, I was inspecting the latest of these gifts, two firkins of fine wines for my table. I said to Margery, who was busy folding away some of my ornately embroidered, linen smocks,

"Methinks that His Grace keeps his friends close but his enemies even closer!" I had no doubt that these were hand-picked for my consumption directly from Wolsey's Great wine cellar at Hampton Court.

"I see that you doubt the sincerity of His Grace's intentions?" Margery replied with a rather wry smile that conveyed to me her own grave doubts. Genuine sincerity was not a quality often seen amongst the eminent nobles and courtiers of Henry's court; and Wolsey was an aficionado at serving himself above all others. Thoughts of my rather delicate relationship with the Cardinal were abruptly swept away by the muffled sounds of shouting coming through one of the parlour's opened windows; sounds which floated up

from a track which ran alongside the southern wall of the castle and beneath the windows of my privy chambers. With Margery close by my side, we hurried to the open window to see the cause of the commotion below.

The window was propped open, as it was a fine and beautiful day; indeed, I remember that it was unseasonably warm for the time of year. As the days grew ever longer, I had awoken early that morning with the first light, in eager anticipation at how Henry and I would while away the carefree hours ahead - as indeed we had every day since I arrived at Windsor. I was somewhat vexed, and not a little anxious, when no message or summons arrived from the King. Margery did her best to soothe me with kind and reassuring words; that his Majesty must have been detained on urgent and state business and that I would, without doubt, hear from him very shortly. I was not easily placated and I sensed Anne's growing restlessness and concern. In order to try and distract myself, I attended mass and broke my fast;

yet still no word had arrived from the King.

Craning my neck to see what was going on below, I witnessed a stream of servants, horses and heavily laden carts leaving the castle and making their way along a narrow track, which led towards the distant forest. A few of the more senior members of the household were headed on horseback in the opposite direction, towards the nearby town. I felt confused and even a little panicky in that moment; was the King leaving the castle without me? Had I offended Henry in some way? However, I had no time to think on it further for suddenly, there was an unexpected knock at the door. Both Margery and I turned around quickly, straightening our skirts and readying ourselves to receive our visitor. My gentleman usher opened the door and announced the identity of our guest.

"Sir George Boleyn, Madame." Both Margery and I turned to look at one another and with a sigh of relief, my brother

swept cheerfully into the room.

"Good morning, ladies!" I must admit I was relieved to see him and looking so happy. I was reassured that all must be well and yet, I could not contain myself. Kissing my brother on the cheek, I asked with a sense of urgency,

"What is happening? Why have I not heard from the King? And..." I half turned, extending my arm and pointing to the noise emanating from the open window behind me, "...pray tell me, what of those people outside? Is the King leaving?" My brother threw his head back in hearty laughter which vexed me even more.

"George!" I cried out through gritted teeth, taking a frustrated swipe at his arm as I begged, "Stop it! Tell me what is going on!" With great mirth, my brother took hold of me by my rather delicate shoulders and said,

"Sweet, sweet sister! Do not fret! The King has commanded

that I come unto you," he said stepping back and taking a deep and gracious bow, as he always did when he wished to make fun of my elevated status. "His Majesty begs Mistress Anne to join him for a most hearty picnic at Windsor Manor." George paused for a moment before adding mischievously, "You do not think that the King could pass an entire day without your company, do you?"

Straightening himself up, he picked up a goblet of the fine wine that my gentleman usher had recently poured for me to taste. Nonchalantly, George sat down in a nearby chair; languidly putting his feet up on an adjacent stool and crossing his outstretched legs. He then held the glass up to the light, examining its clarity and assessing its quality; he seemed to forget altogether that I was still questioning him. I must have looked deeply perplexed as I said,

"A picnic? Windsor Manor? Then what is..." indicating to the commotion and general hubbub that we had

witnessed below. I did not manage to finish my sentence before my brother interjected.

"His Majesty has given explicit instructions that we are to be well fed and well entertained "Shrewsbury," Henry's Lord Steward and in charge of the wider royal household, "has been commanded to make ready our feast and entertainment. I believe they are even sending to the town for provisions and tables for us." He waved his hand dismissively towards the window. "What you see are the cooks and servants going in all directions to make preparations." A wave of relief passed through my body as I turned to smile broadly at Margery, who was already shaking her head as if to say, 'I told you so!'

"When must we be ready?" I asked excitedly, turning back to my brother.

"We leave in an hour," George replied, finally looking up at

me again, grinning broadly. Despite the fact that my brother, more than anyone, enjoyed teasing me and making fun of the King's great doting upon me, I knew that he loved me dearly and was exceptionally proud of his older sister; there was no doubt that he delighted in being the one to bring me happy tidings. It was easy to love George, and as I took in his handsome face and convivial charm, I realised just how close I had grown to him over the previous months, despite long periods of separation. Granted, he could sometimes be a little flippant and careless of the consequences of his actions, but he was fiercely protective of Anne – of me. I often noticed how he watched over me and was the first to be stirred to anger if he ever heard my name being defiled by malicious court gossip. On more than one occasion, either my father or I had to sooth his overheated temper; a temper which threatened to send him thoughtlessly in pursuit of the purveyor of the lies that were being spread about court, so that he might defend my honour.

However, with George's announcement, all my worries were dispersed and instead, my head was filled with thoughts of the fun that lay ahead, basking in Henry's ardent desire. There was much I wanted to do and only a little time to prepare.

"An hour! Then we must make ready," I spoke with urgency to Margery: "Margery, make haste immediately and summon Nan and Mary – I wish all my ladies to accompany me today." Margery laid down the smock which she had been folding, bobbed a curtsey then disappeared from the room in order to find Bess so that she might fetch my two friends. "And I must change." I looked down at the rather plain gown that I had chosen in my neglected misery earlier that morning; I grasped my skirts with both hands, as if to emphasise that on such a beautiful and vibrant day, I – Anne – could look nothing but magnificent for the King.



Emerging from my chambers a little while later, my ladies had worked their magic; I knew when Anne looked at her most eye-catching and radiant best, so I selected a gown of peacock green velvet, which opened at the front and was edged with a narrow border of sable. The contrasting false sleeves and kirtle were fashioned from gold damask, whilst the outer sleeves were lined and turned back with the same sable fur. My cherished pearl necklace, hung with the gold letter 'B' was wrapped twice around my neck, whilst six rows of pearls hung low in a wide sweep from the edge of one shoulder to another. To complete the outfit, Margery fixed a sable parlet into place, which she held together by pinning a brooch at its lower end: it was fashioned from gold, set with six pearls surrounding an emerald; a large, solitary drop pearl hung down from beneath it. Finally, clipped about my waist was a girdle; this consisted of two rows of pearls, three pearls in each row, alternating

with emeralds and diamonds set in a rich gold mount. Margery attached a fine pomander made of gold filigree, given to me as a New Year's gift from my parents. The sponge inside had been soaked with my favourite rosewater perfume; it was a scent which Henry adored against my soft, olive skin. I smiled inwardly. I suspected that the day's merrymaking, a picnic in the warm and bright sunshine, would allow for much playful intimacy between myself and his Majesty and I felt the familiar tingle of passion ignite from deep within my core.

Despite my excitement, however, I felt a little perturbed. As my ladies were dressing me, I caught Anne's reflection in a nearby mirror. Once more, I stared deeply into those beautiful black eyes and realised that I had grown so familiar with her presence, with her face, that I had almost forgotten what I, myself looked like. I think it was in that moment that, for the first time, I seriously doubted whether I would ever see my other life again. The process had been

a slow and gradual separation from the woman that I had once been to the woman I had become; I was ever more deeply ingrained into the fabric of Anne's world and her consciousness. The metamorphosis was almost complete; Anne's famed grace and poise was now my own; her vivacious exuberance and lust for life flowed in my veins; her courage worked its way into the very fibre of my being, so that I now found myself more readily moved to impetuous action and volatile emotions. In short, we were almost as one and it was increasingly difficult for me to distinguish between where Anne's thoughts, feelings and actions ended and my own began.

However, there had been no more time to dwell on this or its implications. Before long, I found myself riding out on Starlight at the head of the day's riding party, and alongside the King. Henry cut a magnificent presence as ever. Seated elegantly above us all on his huge and proud white stallion, he was dressed in fashionable black. Next to his skin, the

King wore a white linen smock embroidered with a thick border of black and silver thread, which was worked around the neck, then vertically down the front of his broad torso; the same embroidery was repeated around the cuffs. Worn over this smock, Henry had chosen to wear a black, velvet doublet and matching hose. The doublet was edged with a wide double border of silver thread; whilst over this, the King sported a skirted jerkin, the full sleeves being slashed, bejewelled and tied with aiglets. I particularly noticed the velvet cap the King wore upon his head; it was decorated with his signature white ostrich feathers - which were so light that they fluttered gently on the most delicate of breezes – whilst at the front was pinned a brooch set with diamonds in the cipher HA. This gesture touched me deeply as I realised the King was declaring to the whole world his love and commitment to his Lady Anne. With the many precious and semi-precious stones worked into the King's garments, Henry literally glistened in the morning sunlight and was every inch the portrait of a King.

With everybody assembled, we made our way out of the castle's upper ward, through a stone gateway and across an ancient bridge into the glorious, warm sunshine. I turned my face towards the sun and gratefully received its rays on my skin. There was a heady fragrance in the air and I drew in a deep breath. It was the kind of fragrance that one only finds in those first few, exquisite days of spring when the sun finally possesses enough strength to begin to heat the Earth. It was a scent which always created a profound sense of *joie de vivre* in my soul; Anne was a sensuous creature and my body could not help but respond to the stirring of Mother Nature.

I glanced over my shoulder and was delighted to note that almost all of those chosen to accompany the King that day were my true friends. There were several Gentlemen of Henry's Privy Chamber including: Sir Henry Norris, a very grateful Sir Thomas Cheney, Sir William Compton, William Carey, a gentleman who was also touched favourably by my

negotiations with Wolsey whose name was John Wallop; my brother George and finally, a little to my surprise, Sir Thomas Wyatt, whom I had not seen in many months. Much to my relief though, Sir Thomas had greeted me courteously enough, yet remembering well my previous reprimand, maintained a stiff reserve and clear determination to keep a discreet distance from my person, particularly in the presence of the King. I was very happy that all my ladies rode with me; Margery on her chestnut mare next to Sir William Compton; Mary rode alongside her husband, whilst Sir Henry and Nan were by the side of the gallant, Sir Thomas. Much to my brother's distaste, we were also accompanied by his wife, Jane, who rode silently next to her husband. Wearing rich fabrics and vibrant colours, bedecked with a wealth of fine jewels, our party must have struck a glorious sight in the brilliant sunshine.

Once across the drawbridge, we made our way along a track which ran parallel to the castle on one side, and was

abutted on the other by a few sporadic dwellings and a pretty little orchard. As we passed through the small stone gateway leading out toward the distant forest, a few townsfolk and several merchants stopped to make way for the King and his noble party; I watched as they doffed their caps, making deep and respectful bows and calling out, 'Long live your Majesty!' Henry always loved to be adored and I could see his bejewelled chest swell with pride.

As we were not hunting, the day was taken at a sedate pace and our palfreys ambled along as we rode largely in silence, the King occasionally questioning one of his courtiers about the business of court, and frequently casting glances in my direction as if to reassure himself that his Anne was still close by his side. Our love, passion, intimacy and longing seemed to grow ever stronger by the day, and I reflected on how I had ridden out with Henry on many occasions since I first arrived at Windsor. I was now quite familiar with the

bewildering maze of forest tracks and trails which cut through this vast expanse of woodland. Quite often, on days when we longed for the greatest privacy, Henry and I would head out on the same path along which we now travelled towards the ancient fields of Runnymede, accompanied only by Henry's Groom of the Stool, Sir Henry Norris and one of my ladies.

On the first of one these outings, Henry took me to see an ancient yew tree which, even in the 1500's, was already woven into the mythology of this ancient landscape. It was believed to be nearly two thousand years old. The Ankerwyke Yew was truly majestic; when I pressed the palms of my hands against its trunk and laid my ear against its rough and textured bark, I could almost hear the tree whispering to me of its many secrets and great wisdom. Like Henry, I grew to adore the magical genius of this ancient site. Time and time again, we would return to sit against its enormous trunk. Sometimes, Henry would

whisper my name into my ear, kissing my cheek, neck and breasts whilst caressing me in his arms; sometimes he would speak plainly of the latest news from the continent and developments, or lack of them, in the case for his annulment. At this stage, I truly think that Henry believed that all his courtiers worked tirelessly and without foibles to bring an end to their master's marriage. Of course, from history, I knew that there were those, including Wolsey, who had a natural inclination and interest to seek a solution to the King's Great Matter in a way which did not involve Anne Boleyn. At those times, Anne's great wit and renowned sharp tongue would come to the fore, I would find myself challenging Henry's unconditional trust, particularly in his first minister. I remembered my pledge to my father and their Graces, the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk; God help me but I knew well that in those days at Windsor, I had begun to plant the seeds in Henry's mind that would eventually pave the way for Wolsey's downfall.

However, my thoughts returned to the present as I was suddenly aware that Henry was grimacing in pain; he clutched at his left thigh as if this were the source of his discomfort. Nobody else seemed to have noticed the King's distress, and I dared not to ask Henry if he were unwell in front of his courtiers. Since I had been in Anne's world, Henry had been in robust health, only occasionally suffering from the mildest of headaches. But I knew that in time the King would suffer greatly from a recurrent ulcer that would, not infrequently, bring Henry to his knees in excruciating pain. Despite his physicians' best efforts, this would become an intractable and festering wound that stubbornly refused to heal. In the last few months of Anne's life,

I would come to understand just how greatly it would trouble him, often sending Henry in foul, black moods that I am sure coloured his judgement. I wondered if what I had witnessed had been the very first, tell-tale signs of Henry's future agony. Yet the moment passed, and I noticed Henry's shoulders relax as he regained his composure.

After riding for a few miles, the dense forest suddenly opened to an extensive clearing at the centre of which was a complex of ancient buildings surrounded by a moat, including a hall, a private-chamber, a chapel, a kitchen and other necessary offices. Henry and I had stopped here on several occasions on our forays in Windsor Great Park; by now, I was quite familiar with the delightful higgledy-piggledy layout of the manor which Henry said had been a favourite royal hunting lodge since the 13th century. Passing through the old South Gate and across the stone bridge which spanned the moat, we made our way along the track that led to the front of this idyllic, moated manor house.

Henry's Lord Steward, George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury had been busy organising a number of yeoman and ushers who had come down from the castle to serve us and attend to our every need.

"Good Morrow, Your Majesty!" the Earl had said

dipping into a rather stiff and awkward bow. The Earl of Shrewsbury was about sixty years of age and probably one of the oldest courtiers still serving in Henry's household. Although in reasonable health, the years had clearly taken their toll and the Earl moved rather deliberately, as one does when rheumatic pain becomes your constant bedfellow. Yet, he was clearly a man of dogged determination and one of life's great survivors.

From my father, I also knew that he was already proving himself to be favourable to Anne's cause, although intuitively, I felt this was from no love for Anne Boleyn, but rather in blind submission to the King's will. As the King approached him, Shrewsbury spoke again, "All is ready for you, Your Grace, and I trust you will find everything to your satisfaction." Holding his white staff of office, Shrewsbury stepped aside and stretched out his arm inviting us to enter the manor. On Henry's arm, the King led me and our party into the Great Hall, where we were

received and refreshed with ale before the Lord Steward then led the way to the gardens at the rear of the lodge; here everything had been made ready for our arrival.

We passed first through the formal knot garden. This was a sight of exquisite beauty, even though it had not yet burst forth into its greatest glory of summer colour. From there we had emerged through a neatly clipped hedge into the privy orchard, which was filled with trees that were newly in leaf. Each and every one of them had just begun to display their sweet and delicate mantle of spring blossom. I marvelled at the sight of it, for it reminded me that I had been in Anne's world for nearly a year. This still seemed utterly incredible to me; I had come to move with ease in aristocratic Tudor society. Yet I no longer feared that I would be found out, as I had come to know Anne almost as well as I knew myself; the sound of her voice, the scent of her skin, the grace of her movement.

"How like you this, sweetheart?" Henry interrupted my thoughts with a broad smile lighting up his face. I was truly enchanted by the scene before us. I could not have spoken with greater sincerity when I said,

"Oh Your Grace, it is simply wonderful!" For our comfort, an area of the orchard was dressed with a multitude of rich and fine rugs and piles of silk and velvet cushions, all arranged in a large horseshoe shape; around the outer edges, long sturdy oak tables were draped with fine, white linen cloths. The buffet, already piled high with expensive silver gilt plate, had included a bounty of food; plovers, partridges, larks and rabbits, as well as many exotic fruits, sweetmeats and lashings of cream. I was delighted that Henry had commanded his consort to attend upon us and play sweet music to accompany our picnic. I always sensed that music was deeply rooted in Anne's soul.

In short order, we were soon served the many fine dishes that had been prepared by Henry's privy kitchen staff.

Henry's fool, Will Somers, had also travelled down from the castle. Although he had only been at court for a little over two years, he was well known by all and much loved by the King. After one hilarious performance when Will minced about the King's Presence Chamber in an outrageous imitation of the pompous Cardinal Wolsey, I asked Henry about Will's story. The King told me Somers was a Shropshire born man who had been brought to his attention by a certain master Richard Fermore.

The chemistry and mutual regard between these two men was instant; 'I like him well, for his comedy excels them all and he meddles not in my affairs' the King stated matter-of-factly. For the most part, I too loved Will's wicked sense of humour. However, when I first came to court, Somers often appeared with his pet monkey, a great favourite of Katherine's. Although an animal lover in my modern day life, I was surprised to find myself recoiling from the creature with great distaste; I soon realised that

Anne had a morbid fear of these particular creatures. Clearly, he had seen my discomfort and recognising that Mistress Anne was riding ever higher in the King's favour, he rarely appeared in my presence with a monkey again. Far from being the fool, Will Somers was possibly the wisest man at court and before long, Will entertained us in such ribald speech that I laughed heartily; so much so that I thought that I would choke on my wine. Not one of us, not even the King, could claim refuge from Will's scurrilous jokes and unbridled mocking. His humour clearly appealed to Anne's wit and sense of playfulness; I had long since understood Anne's enormous capacity to throw herself into life, and with those who knew her well, she was incredibly mischievous and fun loving.

Finally, when the feasting was over and we laughed until we cried, in high exuberance, I jumped up to my feet, sweeping in front of the King with a deep and elegant curtsy. I fixed Henry with Anne's famous bewitching eyes

and seductive smile, saying sensuously,

"Your Grace, I think to dance for your great pleasure," adding somewhat teasingly, "If your Majesty will permit it, of course." Henry, lying propped up on his side, resting on one elbow with one knee bent up and crossed in front of the other outstretched leg, smiled at me indulgently and indicated with a flick of his finger that I should proceed. With a swish of my skirts, I beckoned Mary and Nan to join me on our grassy stage. For in between the times that I spent with the King, my ladies and I practised our dancing with great enthusiasm.

By that time, I had been increasingly experiencing flashes of what I was sure were Anne's memories; often these were of her dancing in a grand and sumptuous room accompanied by dashing and gallant partners; memories I assumed were from her days at the French court in the service of Queen Claude. In those memories, were elegant

and sweeping movements with leaps of great lightness and delicacy as if Anne was being carried by an angel's wings. Yet when I practiced the dance with my ladies, I also found myself drawing boldly upon my modern day heritage; for I too had learned the art of dancing – ballet as a child and later in life, flamenco. Together, the three of us had spent many happy hours in my Privy apartments; weaving my knowledge of dance with Anne's. During those heady days at Windsor, I created new dance moves which both awed, and sometimes scandalised, my 16th century friends and which, I would later find out, would make their way into the iconography of Tudor dance.

With my two ladies standing slightly behind me and at either side, I kicked off my shoes, which I knew was a scandalous thing to do in its own right. There was a sharp intake of breath from the elderly Earl of Shrewsbury who was shocked at my audacity and wanton behaviour, but Henry's gaze lingered a moment on my stocking-feet

and ankles with only appreciative lust in his eyes. Playing the moment for all it was worth, with great coquettishness, I indicated for the music to begin. My ladies and I began our dance of seduction; the like of which had never been seen before at Henry's court. I realised early on that neither Nan nor Mary possessed the same innate acceptance of their sexuality as Anne, whose mastery of the art was unsurpassed. With some amusement, I often wondered whether Anne's famed allure resulted from the overtones of the modern day, progressive woman that now shared her body; did this create her utterly unique essence of womanhood which eclipsed and eluded her contemporaries?

Watching how other men fell under Anne's hypnotic spell, Mary and Nan relentlessly quizzed me about my sexual appeal. So I worked hard to teach them all that I could of how to move their body, use their eyes and shape their energy to mesmerise any man.

From time to time, I would see flashes, memories, of an exquisitely dressed lady teaching me all she knew of courtly love and graceful demeanour. I strongly suspected that this was Margaret of Austria into whose care Anne had been entrusted for a year, probably at the tender age of twelve. I realised how impressionable Anne must have been at that age; influenced deeply by the presence of so great a lady, one who could enthrall even the likes of the dashing Charles Brandon. As the three of us moved in graceful unison, we concocted a spell of heady sexuality; lighting a flame of burning desire which ignited not only the King, but every man present.

With our final steps, we three ladies sank into a deep curtsey. For a moment, there was utter silence; our audience were entranced, yet unsure of how our provocative movements would be received by the King. I dared not move, my eyes were downcast as my body pulsed from both exertion and anxiety. Had I pushed the

boundaries of decorum too far? Would Henry rebuke and shame me in public for my boldness? Suddenly, Henry burst into enthusiastic applause; the spell finally broken, the remainder of our party swept us up in delighted applause and shouts of appreciation of our grace and elegance. I raised my gaze to meet Henry's who beckoned me forward. As I reached him, the King stretched up, playfully grabbing me by the waist and pulling me down onto the soft cushions next to him. I shrieked with pleasure as Henry drew me close and kissed me tenderly on the lips.

Seeing our affinity, Henry's courtiers discreetly continued with their own conversations whilst I lay stretched out my back staring up at the flawless sky. For a moment, I watched a bird of prey circling about above us, twisting its tail feathers this way and that, steering itself effortlessly as it was carried upwards on the rising thermals; its occasional and haunting screech declaring its dominion across the forest canopy. I closed my eyes, basking in the warm sun

as it fell upon my face. When I opened them, I found Henry looking down at me, eyes full of lust and desire. I shivered with exquisite pleasure as he traced the tip of his finger across my cheek, down my neck, across my breast, finally coming to rest his palm on my belly. It was a delicious moment of intimacy between us; disinheriting the world, we lay locked in a silent embrace as if trying to uncover the deepest essence of the other's soul. The King spoke softly and in wonder,

"You sing like Orpheus, you dance like the goddess Terpsichore and you hunt like Diana. Where did you come from Anne Boleyn? It seems to me that you are not of this world." I nearly laughed aloud, for Henry did not realise just how close he was to the truth! His gaze softened, a small frown appearing across his forehead as he had tried to fathom the mystery that was Anne Boleyn. "Forsooth, I have never met another woman like you; the sexiest creature to walk this earth. Methinks that God

himself has poured into you all the sweetness of womanhood and sent you to me as a divine blessing."

I saw in Henry's bright blue eyes, beyond the power of his Majesty, a small bewildered child afraid that such a blessing he did not deserve. The King held me there in silence before he spoke the words that I had not yet heard spoken with such raw intensity. "I love you, Anne. Swear to me that you will never leave my side." The naked simplicity of Henry's declaration suddenly broke open a deep well of emotion that I had pushed away into the darkest recesses of my mind. I was engulfed by the reality of my situation, as I knew that Henry's request highlighted the shocking nature of the betrayal, of his betrayal, which lay ahead of Anne. I could not help but turn my face away from him.

"Anne, what is the matter, do my words offend you?" Henry hesitated for a moment, slightly unsure of himself;

"Do you not love me?" I looked at the King and despite myself, and all that I knew lay ahead for Anne, my heart burst with love for him. "Yes, Henry, I do love you," and this, God help me, was and still is, my truth.

Chapter Eighteen

Palace of Placentia, Greenwich

May 1, 1528

May began with a flurry of colourful pageantry. The whole court was swept up in anticipation of the forthcoming May Day celebrations, the chivalric centerpiece of which was the annual May Day joust to be held at Greenwich Palace. It was a time of great rejoicing by every Englishman for the day heralded the beginning of summer. After the severe and bleak winter that had held England in icy subjugation, spirits were high; it was time to revel in the abundance of Mother Nature and to give oneself over to the pursuit of courtly love and romance. Yet finding myself ensconced in my privy apartments overlooking the Thames, I had not felt the slightest inclination to give myself over to anyone or anything.

Despite my best efforts to control my temper, I was angry with the King. On the previous day, Henry tried, as tactfully as he was able, to break the news that on this day of public festivity, Katherine was to accompany him to the joust; as Queen she must preside over proceedings. Henry's greatest love was jousting and he participated fearlessly in the lists with great honour and skill. Perhaps I had no right to feel this way, but I found it virtually intolerable to think of Henry paying courtly deference to his Queen; that in his hour of triumph, I should yet again be holed up out of sight of the court – no better than a common whore.

I was overwhelmed with rabid jealousy and within moments exploded into a fit of unbridled rage. I ranted at the King; the toll of suppressing and managing my emotions over many months, of having to share him with Katherine, suddenly came to an intense head of pressure which burst forth in a torrent of anger and frustration. With a raised voice, I harshly accused the King of caring little for my feelings,

for using me to fulfil his own needs with scant regard for the difficulty of my position. How could he treat me thus? The vehemence of my tirade reduced the King to tears, as he begged me to forgive him and vowed his eternal love. While my anger eventually abated, my frustrations simmered dangerously in my breast. Not even my mother, who had visited me earlier that morning to try to soothe my fiery temper, had made any headway. So I was left alone with only the tempest of my mind to keep me company; I had no wish for another encounter with the Queen's Majesty.

I sighed heavily, leaning slightly forward and resting both my palms and forehead against the smooth glass of the window next to where I was standing. On the Thames below, a pair of mated, mute swans guided their clutch of newly hatched cygnets downstream passed the King's Royal Apartments with regal dignity. At that moment, I longed for such a state of grace to take hold within my being. It was frustrating, as I had tried so hard to live up to

everyone's expectations; to compress and contain my emotions; my rage, frustration, jealousy and love into a small dark place beyond the reach of my consciousness. I earnestly invited an ocean of patience, equanimity and grace to fill the void which I had sought to create in denying myself. Yet these visitors stubbornly refused to accept my invitation. So instead, I was left to drown in a swell of my own negativity. The worst of it was, I was deeply cross with myself. I knew for the sake of the love that I bore for Henry, and which he bore me, that I would have to learn to cultivate graciousness and poise in the face of such challenges. In many ways, I considered myself lucky, for up until now, Henry always rushed to placate me and assuage my anxieties; I only ever saw kindness and concern in his eyes. Yet I was painfully aware that the strength of Anne's character, so distinctive among the many docile English roses at court, the very dimension of her personality which so attracted and enthralled Henry, would ultimately be the very thing that drove him into the arms of another

woman. It was as if I wanted to save Anne from herself and I prayed fervently to God to deliver unto me the strength and patience I needed to face the vicissitudes of fate. Yet patience did not come. Gripped by the demons which seized my mind, I began to pace up and down in front of the window, arms folded in front of me, turning this way and that, continually tormented by the thought of Henry at Katherine's side. In the vacuum created by Henry's absence, it was easy to slip into a sea of paranoia, a sea in which it was all too easy to drown. I was convinced that Henry would cast me aside having looked once more into Katherine's eyes and discovered afresh the love that they once shared.

"Madame." A soft voice interrupted the maelstrom of my thoughts; I looked up to find Nan standing at the doorway to the little parlour. "Yes, Nan. What can I do for you?"

"Are you all right, Madame? I know how difficult it is for you when the King..." Her voice trailed away awkwardly.

Nan was a sensitive soul, empathetic and compassionate. She understood the unbearable pain that it caused me when Henry spent time with another woman – even if that woman was his wife. As I couldn't bear to see my friend reflect my pain, I turned my back toward her and began pacing once more, one arm crossed in front of my body, the other bent up, biting anxiously at my fingernails. I was helplessly submerged once again by the relentless and dangerous currents of frustration which stirred my mind. Lost to myself, I did not notice that Nan was unsure of how to placate me, and had tentatively stepped forward, picking up the little vellum-bound book which I had earlier placed upon the sideboard. I did not hear her turn its crisp pages, drowned out as it was by the noise of the incessant chatter which filled my head. After some moments though, Nan spoke again,

"Forgive me, Madame but... What is this book?" I glanced over my shoulder. "Oh, it's nothing, just..." As I began to

dismiss Nan's curiosity, the significance of the moment struck me with a flash of intense clarity. Nan had just picked up the copy of 'The Obedience of a Christian Man' given to me by Edward Foxe when he had visited Hever Castle. Since it had been entrusted into my care by that gentle soul, I had immersed myself entirely in Master Tyndale's treatise on how a Christian Prince ought to govern, and the excesses and unholy influence of the Roman Catholic Church. I knew why Anne was so fascinated by this text and why she and her father were clearly convinced that the words contained within it could hold the key to resolving the King's Great Matter. At every possible opportunity, I closeted myself away, diligent in my task and willingly surrendering myself to the wisdom contained within it. Oftentimes, with no quills to hand, I found myself marking out relevant tracts with the tip of my thumbnail.

Now, fully awakened by the immediacy of the moment, I walked over to Nan with new resolve. Taking her hands,

which now held within them the very seed of the English Reformation, I looked into Nan's pretty blue eyes and spoke in earnest,

"This is a godly book, Nan, and one which you **must** read. It is written by Master Tyndale." Nan made a delicate, yet sharp intake of breath. She knew only too well that the words contained within its pages were dangerous words indeed and could cost you your life. I continued on speaking urgently "It is the duty of every Christian man and woman to read such texts for the truth contained herein will set a light burning so brightly in your soul that none shall be able to set it out; forsooth it is verily the word of God himself." It was clear that Nan had not been expecting such a book to fall into her possession, nor for her mistress to entreat her so passionately to read it. I knew that Nan favoured the reformed faith and I knew what fate had in store for this little book and for the first time that day,

I felt a profound sense of calm within my being. I realised that I had been selfishly lost in my own small, self-centred world, but once again, I was reminded of the enormous stage on which Anne Boleyn played. The love affair between Henry and Anne may well be a fairytale; yet this was never to be an ordinary love; Anne was a catalyst in the events that would bring forth historical changes in English society. My friend smiled appreciatively at my words, finally taking the book and holding it against her breast as she spoke,

"In God's name, I swear that I shall keep it close to my person and not let it out of my sight." I nodded and then watched as Nan curtsied, turned and disappeared from whence she had come. Now all I had to do was wait; wait until Nan returned in great distress confessing that the book had been stolen by one of Wolsey's men. I would know what to do, for history had already ordained it. My heart was thundering in my chest; I was both exhilarated and terrified

as this epic moment began to unfold itself before my very eyes.

Chapter Nineteen

Palace of Placentia, Greenwich

May 4, 1528

With the King deeply preoccupied with the Privy Council, I had taken it upon myself to organise a competition, shooting at the rounds, with a handful of Anne's closest friends and allies. Over the last twelve months, I had become an inveterate gambler and much accustomed to the courtly preoccupation for betting, particularly on the outcome of card games or dice. I soon understood that, as in other areas of her life, Anne was a risk-taker and often successful; though, I must confess that I frequently overstretched the mark and on those occasions, with a raised eyebrow, the King would graciously agree to pay off my debts from the Privy Purse.

That day, I challenged my friends to an archery

tournament in the Great Garden adjacent to the Banquet House at Greenwich Palace. After the devastating and sodden summer of the previous year, everyone rejoiced when spring burst forth with such great promise of fine and agreeable weather. Yet our hopes were dashed yet again; for the summer of 1528 was to be little better than its predecessor. Since the beginning of May we had been plagued by persistent downpours and squally showers. So the court was again confined indoors for days on end, passing the time playing cards or dice, making music, writing poetry, dancing or taking exercise in the Privy Gallery. I was always reluctant to partake in the latter, for at Greenwich, the gallery ran close to the Queen's Privy Chambers and I was determined that I would not endure another confrontation with Katherine.

Yet to my delight, when I arose that morning, I found the sun streaming through the window of my bedchamber, set brilliantly as it was against a flawless sky. By May 1528,

Anne's influence at court was such that her wishes were accommodated with almost the same ease as if it were the King himself making a request. So, it was straightforward for me to summon an usher as soon as I had dressed, and arrange for butts to be erected in the Great Garden for our disport and pleasure.

The garden itself was set toward the south side of the palace precinct. It was surrounded by a high wall, laid formally with six large, symmetrical flower beds intersected by broad gravel paths which gave space open enough for us to shoot at the rounds. Behind us rose up the relatively newly built Banqueting House and slightly beyond that the imposing tilt yard towers, which provided spectacular views, not only of the tournaments staged in the tiltyard below, but also of the surrounding countryside and the distant city of London. Away to our left, to the south of the palace, was the sweeping majesty of Castle Hill, eponymously named after the diminutive outline of

Duke Humphrey's Tower, which was perched upon its summit.

I took in a deep breath, filling my nostrils with the sweet, scented smell of the early summer roses and honeysuckle which scrambled up the red-brick wall of this delightful privy garden. The world shone with a vibrancy that was almost shocking in its beauty; a riot of colours seemed more vivid, aromas more potent, and even the most ordinary of objects seemed alive and somehow magically connected to my own sense of being. I realised that the palace had become my home and that I was profoundly happy. Everything in the world seemed just as it should. All that Anne was, all that she was ever meant to be, had found its foothold in this world. With some wonder, I finally realised that in my modern day life, I always had a nagging doubt, far too nebulous for me to describe, that there was a destiny awaiting me which was far greater than the small and constricted life that I had been living.

Now there I was, there was Anne, adored by a mighty Prince. It was if a powerful wind had finally caught up my sails, unfurling them to reveal the full expression of my own particular karma.

I looked around at my friends who gathered with me; all of them in good spirits. We knew each other well and there was little need for pretence between us: my brother; Sir Henry Norris, Sir William Carey, Mary Norris, my sister, Mary and finally Joan Champernowe, who although pregnant had returned to attend upon me and rejoin our little circle of friends. Neither Joan, nor my sister, joined us in the archery, choosing instead to stand aside, teasing the gentleman good-naturedly when they failed to hit their mark. As we each took turns to shoot at the butt, there was much joviality, laughter and banter as we decried one's good fortune, or celebrated another, when an arrow failed to make its target. To my delight, I was in great form and on one occasion even cleft the mark in the middle,

surpassing them all in skill and grace.

I was in the middle of taking aim for my next shot, when suddenly, I heard urgent footsteps on the gravel pathway coming towards us. I lowered my bow and arrow and turned to see who was approaching. Nan was running towards us at great speed, the hem of her skirts clutched up in her hands so that she might reach us all the sooner. Before I had chance to say anything, my friend threw herself at my feet, clutching my skirts and through great racking sobs she said,

"Oh Madame, Madame, please, please forgive me..!" She buried her head in my kirtle before looking up at me again, her reddened eyes silently entreating me with desperate pleas for my understanding. I handed my bow and arrow to George, who stood close by my side, before I too sank to my knees. Placing one hand on Nan's shoulder, I lifted her chin with the other and spoken evenly,

"Nan, calm yourself and tell me what has happened."

Nan tried desperately to control her sobs which were coming through great gulps of air. Eventually, she managed to say,

"Madame, something terrible has happened! Your book... George took it from me." I knew immediately that she was referring to her lover, Master George Zouche. "I begged him to give it back to me, but he said that he wished to read such a goodly text for himself. I was called away to you as I tried to retrieve it from him...but thinking the book belonged to me, he took it." Nan looked at me with a desperate terror in her eyes, but I knew what she was going to say and I felt an incredible sense of calm descend upon me. Nan continued her story, "Oh, Madame, I swore that I would not let it out of my sight; I have let you down!" Nan cried before bursting again into another gale of sorrowful sobs. However, I needed Nan to finish her story, so I took her firmly by the shoulders and gently

shook her to raise her from her hysteria.

"Nan, what has happened to the book? You must tell me. It is all right, I am not cross with you or Master Zouche, but I need to know the truth." I spoke with dignified authority, for I knew with certainty that now was not the time to lose one's head. My stern words seemed to bring Nan to her senses and she took one deep breath before continuing,

"George was in the King's Chapel reading it when the Dean, Dr Sampson came in. George was so delighted with what he was reading that he caught Dr Sampson's eye and did not see the priest approaching. Before he had any chance to hide the book, the Dean snatched it from him and looked upon it for himself. He cursed my love with most foul language, saying that these were heretical words." Nan paused once more, still struggling to regain her composure. "He demanded to know the name of my love and whose man he was. Madame, he is to turn it over to His Grace,

Cardinal Wolsey...I am so afraid... I'm so, so sorry..." Her words trailed away yet again, but by now I heard all I needed to know. Placing my arms around my friend, I lifted Nan to her feet, indicating to Mary Norris as I commanded,

"Mary, take Nan to my privy chambers and see that she gets some posset to soothe her disquiet." Mary stepped forward, put her arm around Nan's shoulder, and lead her gently back into the main palace complex. I looked round at my friends, all of whom stood silent, gripped by an ominous foreboding of what such a discovery might lead to; it was well known that the King was a conservative in his religion and had little tolerance for heretics of the reformed faith. It was also well known at court that the Cardinal had commanded his prelates, and especially Dr Sampson, Dean of the King's Chapel, to keep a vigilant eye over all people for such books, so that they might not come to the King's reading.

Yet amongst my friends, I alone knew of the great

opportunity that would arise like a phoenix from the ashes of this dangerous situation. I imagined Wolsey gloating over what he undoubtedly perceived as his triumph; yet he had underestimated Anne and the depths of the King's infatuation yet again. Unwittingly, it would be Wolsey who would be the first catalyst of the Reformation taking hold in England; he had just handed the perfect opportunity for Anne to light the fuse that would blow apart the Roman Catholic Church in England and ultimately bring about his ruin. "Sir Henry, where might I find the King?" I said directly and without hesitation. Before Henry Norris could reply, my brother interjected,

"Sister, do you think it is wise to speak directly to the King of such matters?"

"Brother, you do not know the King as I have come to know him. Let me tell you this; his Majesty listens to those who have the wit to be the first to lay their case before him, and in this matter, I am resolved to shape the King's

mind towards the truth." I suspected my brother saw only too well the fierce resolve that had already taken hold within my breast and he knew that there was little use in attempting to dissuade me further. I turned back towards Sir Henry, "Sir Henry?" I asked again impatiently.

"I would imagine the King is finished in Council. He is most likely in his Privy Chamber."

"Then there is no time to lose," I raised myself to my full height before stalking off in dogged determination to find the King's Grace in his apartments.



I eventually found Henry in his private study, and as I was being escorted into the King's presence, I passed the Duke of Suffolk who was just leaving. We greeted each other cordially enough, yet as always with my Lord of Suffolk

there was an air of circumspect refrain. I thought for a moment to catch His Grace by the arm and tell him of Wolsey's audacity; for the Duke of Suffolk hated Wolsey as much as any man at court. Yet I decided to keep my counsel until I had spoken directly with the King. When I entered Henry's private chamber, I found him studying a set of maps; yet he had been alerted to my arrival and looked up immediately.

"Sweetheart! How are..." The King stopped in his tracks, his broad smile suddenly crumpling into deep frown of concern, for in my steely resolve I could not match his warm countenance. "Anne, what is it my love? Does something trouble you?" Henry asked as he moved round from behind his desk and made his way towards me, his arms open and outstretched inviting my response. With this, I ran forward and dropped to my knees in front of the King. Looking up at Henry's towering presence, I held his gaze firmly and spoke with such passion that I might have converted the devil himself to Christianity.

"Your Grace, something has been taken from me that I hold most dear." I paused for a moment as Henry cocked his head quizzically to one side, a small furrow forming between his eyebrows. He remained silent, but I knew that I had his permission to go on. "It is a book that I lent to one of my ladies, Mistress Gainsford. She in turn lent it to her betrothed, Master Zouche, and from him it was seized by Dr Sampson under orders from His Grace, Cardinal Wolsey."

"What book do you speak of, sweetheart?"

"Verily, Your Majesty it is the dearest book that ever the Dean or Cardinal took away." I paused briefly, gathering up my courage before taking a deep breath and forging on fiercely, "It is entitled, 'The Obedience of a Christian Man, by Master Tyndale.'" I watched as the King's eyebrows raised in astonishment at the name of this well-known, Lutheran heretic. "Your Majesty...Henry...forsooth, I swear to you

upon my life that in this book are words which decry the unholy interference of the Pope upon your Majesty's God given right to govern supremely within your own realm." Henry reached down to me, much as I had reached down to Nan, and lifted me to my feet. There was a moment of silence between us.

Suddenly, it was not my Lord that I stood before, but my love. I think that my passion must have stirred something primitive within the King, for he drew me close and with our lips almost touching, I whispered,

"My love, I believe with all my heart that Master Tyndale speaks of matters that could free you from Katherine and finally allow us to be wed."

Henry paused in contemplation of these sweet words which filled the air with promise. He lifted up his left hand, and with his right index finger and thumb, withdrew an ornate

ring from his little finger. He then took my hand, tenderly placing the golden ring, which bore Henry's cipher in diamonds, within my palm. Closing my fingers about it he said,

"Then you must take this as a token. Deliver it to His Grace and request that I command the book to be returned unto you." Henry's eyes narrowed almost imperceptibly, but enough to convey the gravity of his intent. He continued, "Then I command you to bring this book to me so that I may see it. For if you speak the truth, then verily, it is precious indeed."

"Thank you, Your Grace." I said softly with a warm and alluring smile that drew the King in ever closer, until our bodies pressed firmly against one another. In this way, we passed several breathless moments, the mutual desire to lose oneself in the other, surging up in waves of ferocious passion. Henry leaned forward, lifting up my chin and gently biting my lower lip; teasing me with his gentle kisses. I

closed my eyes, yielding helplessly to his touch; extending my neck, I sought to keep myself afloat from drowning in an ocean of rapture and longing. I was intoxicated by the warm, musky scent of the King's cheek as he brushed it against my own; the sharp bristles of his beard to which I had grown accustomed, sending small electric shocks through every cell of my body. I could not help but notice a growing flush of desire between my legs. Henry reached his arms around me and grabbed hold of my buttocks, drawing me up and pressing me closer to his body. It was clear that he was deeply aroused.

"Oh, Anne! I want you." Henry groaned before picking me up effortlessly, my legs lifting up to clench about his waist. He spun me around so that I perched on the edge of his desk. Our kisses became frantic as they often did when we found ourselves in such moments of intimacy. Suddenly, Henry broke away from me, his hands resting on either side of my waist; my legs clasped around him. He held my gaze with the intense focus that a hunter would

behold its prey. So lost was he in his rapaciousness for my body that I wondered if I would be able to withhold the King from fulfilling his ultimate desire. However, what happened next took me by surprise. The King unfastened the front of my loose English gown, before unfastening my front-lacing kirtle. He pulled deliberately at those laces, so that the smock below was revealed by degree. When it was loose enough, he said in a whisper,

"Show me your pretty dukkies." Henry and I had shared many moments of passion and tender intimacy; we had run our hands up and down each other's body as if the other was a fantastical adventure hiding great swathes of unknown territory to be explored, but I had never shown my nakedness to him. I confess that I found Henry's sheer magnetism overwhelmingly sexy and incredibly exciting; I was well aware that as an alpha female, Anne responded in kind, and I sensed that as their physical and sexual intimacy deepened, Henry and I would enjoy the play of dominance

and submission in the bedroom.

The King stepped backwards, whilst with an air of shy submission, for I knew even then how to arouse him, I slowly unlaced more of the kirtle, until it was easy for me to pull down the linen chemise to reveal my naked breasts. The King was breathing heavily; his eyes roamed across the soft swell my breasts in wonderment. Suddenly, before I knew what had happened, Henry's coiled and serpentine energy burst forth as he pushed me back passionately onto the desk; his mouth coming down to clasp itself around my left nipple and cover my breasts in frantic and ardent kisses. I heard myself cry out involuntarily, and found myself in a storm of erotic love and ever closer to being shipwrecked on the King's shore. Somehow managing to fight my way back from the brink, I came to my senses, as I was well aware that Anne was not yet secure, that the marriage bed was yet too far away to give myself entirely to Henry. I needed to stop this torrent of passion, yet give the King release of his

sexual tension. With urgent whispers I gasped,

"Henry, let me give you pleasure." With that Henry stopped and looked up at me with a gaze soaked in lust. I pushed the King gently away and slipping effortlessly into the dominant role, I turned about our positions; stalking the King, I held his gaze and demanded his submission. With Henry now leaning back against the desk, I stood, partially naked from the waist up, in front of him. I had smiled provocatively, before sinking to my knees and transporting the King into an ocean of divine ecstasy.

Chapter Twenty

Palace of Placentia, Greenwich

May 6, 1528

Two days later, I was walking alone with my father in the privy orchard at Greenwich. It was an enchanting and balmy evening; the languid buzzing of bees filled the canopy of the apple trees above us, bringing them alive with a hum of industrious expectation; whilst an occasional fragile petal would fall down like a silken raindrop, forming a carpet of delicate blossom under our feet. I glanced at Sir Thomas Boleyn who looked every inch the wealthy and favoured nobleman.

He was dressed that day in the latest fashion. His silk doublet was a delicate pinkish-mauve colour. This contrasted admirably with the deep tone of crimson in the velvet bands edging the garment; the square-neck opening,

the waist-belt and two guards around the bottom of the skirt also had a border of the same coloured fabric. My father wore a crisp white linen shirt which sat low about the neck with frills at the wrists; cuts across the chest area of his doublet produced slits through which the linen lining of the garment was visible. The cloak my father wore must have been new, for I had not seen it before. It was truly dazzling; made of cloth of silver damask, lined and turned back with sable and edged with a double band of silver passamayne. Finally, as was often the case, Sir Thomas wore a black velvet hat upon his head, decorated with a gold medallion pinned to the underside of the brim.

Spending time alone, we took the opportunity to discuss the incident involving Nan Gainsford and the little book that I had lent to her. After sending an usher to retrieve it from Wolsey with the King's token, I delivered 'The Obedience' myself into the King's hands. The King had devoured it quickly, calling me back into his

presence the following afternoon. When I came upon him, I found him clutching the book in his hand, his eyes were alight with eager anticipation and he could not contain his enthusiasm. No sooner had I arisen from my deep and deferential curtsy, did the King exclaim his great joy at the marvellous words contained therein.

My father was silent for some time as I recounted the episode, his sharp intellect circling through the complex web of ramifications and opportunities that this might bring forth. We walked some paces in silence, side-by-side before my father spoke again,

"Tell me again, what did the King say to you then, exactly?" He spoke to me with equanimity, keeping his gaze directed before him.

"He said that, 'this book is for me and all kings to read'." I too spoke without looking at my father, remaining focused on the path ahead. After some further consideration, my

father delivered his verdict.

"Then this is good news indeed, for it means that His Majesty will find himself at odds not only with his Grace, the Cardinal but also with the filthy stranglehold of the Pope." My father stopped in his tracks, taking a deep breath as he raised his face to the sky; his distinguished profile illuminated in the rich glow of the early evening sunset. There was a moment's silence before he continued, "It is a beginning, Anne. Wolsey has played into our hands. If we continue to advance with wisdom and wit, methinks that we will evermore be able to bend his Majesty's mind toward our cause." My father looked at me, reaching up to stroke my cheek affectionately, as he continued, "Let us see what news from Rome. I hear tell that Dr Foxe arrived at Calais yesterday and will presently come to court."

I knew that there was great expectation for the return of the King's trusted ambassadors. I was painfully aware that this delicate matter was far from resolved. Yet, I kept this to

myself and planned to make marvellous demonstrations of great joy should Dr. Foxe bring back good tidings from the continent. I smiled good-naturedly at my father, allowing him to offer me his arm, which I graciously took. Together we walked back to my privy apartments, for I needed to make myself ready; that evening I was to entertain the King in my chamber.

A little later, I received the King's Majesty as a guest at my table for supper. However, I found myself in entirely, and somewhat unexpectedly, different surroundings. Just a couple of days before, my mother and I hastily relocated from my apartments, which had been close to those of the King's, to the tiltyard towers, which were set separately from the main palace and on the western side of the complex. Henry was concerned for an outbreak of measles had taken hold of the court, affecting, amongst others, the twelve-year-old Princess Mary.

The tiltyard towers were originally designed to provide magnificent views across the tiltyard below, allowing courtiers and visitors alike to follow the spectacle of the joust in great comfort. In every way, they paid homage to the chivalric values which underpinned the sport of jousting; octagonal stair-turrets surmounted with fanciful pencil-pointed pinnacles, providing a mock mediaeval backdrop to this most beloved sport of the Tudor nobility. There was no doubt that the towers dominated the palace complex, and although I was entirely familiar with their external appearance, I was delighted to finally explore their interior.

On the morning of our relocation, my mother, my ladies and I were led along a gallery which connected the towers to the main buildings at the western end of the Queen's Apartments. The towers themselves comprised five storeys; each turret being set at every level with tall rectangular windows on each external facet. This let in a flood of light, allowing a truly panoramic view of the tiltyard, the tournament and the surrounding countryside. In turn, each

tower was connected to the other by a complex of galleries or rooms. Whilst on the first floor, the gallery was windowless, providing an open but sheltered space from which to view the joust; on the top floor was a large fenestrated gallery that served as a kind of bizarre museum, housing a whole array of horse and man armour, arranged on lifeless, wooden dummies.

With no tournaments imminent, my mother, my ladies and I had the towers to ourselves. Although I found the gallery a peaceful place to pass the time, it was strangely haunting. In the few short weeks that I stayed there, I was often drawn to visit it. I would find myself walking alone amongst the mannequins, pausing often to run my fingers across the cold steel and musing on whether any of these pieces would survive to find its way into the modern day collection of the Royal armoury.

Yet I had found something else even more troubling. Oftentimes I would stare down at the empty tiltyard below

and imagine a time when, eight years in the future, Henry would suddenly storm off leaving Anne alone to preside over the annual May Day joust; I often wondered if she was unaware of her impending doom; surely at the very least she must have been deeply anxious that something was sorely amiss. I tried to imagine the fear that must have gripped her; a sense of rising panic in the face of the King's growing disdain and rejection.

I knew well that Anne would gather about her many enemies at court during her relationship with Henry, and that she would always be deeply unpopular with the people of England. Yet while the King loved her above all others, she would be safe and protected from the pack of wolves which would always circle her, baying for her blood; I mused on how she must have known, sensed even, that as Henry recoiled from her, there was little to stop her freefall into oblivion. Of course at that stage, I never for a moment thought that I would taste that bitter poison for myself; at

the time, it was all still in my imagination. For this reason, despite the palace at Greenwich being an exquisite example of early Tudor architecture and royal magnificence, I could never feel at peace there, I was always compelled on some subtle level to flee from the place which would ultimately be the stage for Anne's dramatic downfall.

However, all this was in the future. On that evening, I had sat opposite my love, waited on only by Margery and Sir Henry Norris, who had accompanied the King from his Privy Chambers. I sensed that Henry was in good spirits, although an undercurrent of tension pricked the air, for we were awaiting the imminent arrival of Dr. Foxe and his news from Orvieto; indeed, Henry had already conveyed orders that his almoner should be brought directly to us upon his arrival at court.

The King also decreed that it was to be a quiet and intimate evening; a chance to delight in each other's company and share our anticipation of happy tidings. I knew Henry's

mind; he wished us to hear the news together and in private; for as far as Henry was concerned, it pertained to the weightiest matter of state which required some secrecy and a large degree of discretion. As we supped, the King's lutenist serenaded us softly in the background, Henry talked openly of his mind. By the gentle flicker of candlelight, I listened attentively. A warm and radiant light softly illuminated Henry's face. I took the opportunity to appraise His Grace's features, for I still marvelled that I looked daily upon the King of England; never knowing whether this would be the last time I would find myself in Henry's presence; a thought, I realised with some apprehension, that I found evermore difficult to bear.

Yet, it was Henry who was mesmerised by Mistress Anne; her honour and sheer strength of will always keeping the King at arm's length, which I knew drove Henry into a frenzy of longing. Often, I would catch him staring at me as if he were beholding a divine vision of celestial magnificence. However, by now, I recognised a deeper truth.

What I came to realise was that Henry was an emotional fortress; huge defensive walls, like those which surrounded his many palaces, kept him safe in an isolated refuge where others could not reach him. Oh, he appeared outgoing, charismatic and sociable – and on the surface Henry was all these things; through his majesty and sheer physical presence, he controlled and dominated all those about him. Yet, at the core, he was vulnerable, needy and fearful. I believed that Anne was the first woman to truly understand this.

Finding myself in Anne's shoes, deeply embroiled in this most passionate of relationships, I came to understand the workings of the King's mind. Henry had let down the drawbridge and allowed Anne to see his naked vulnerability. She was the first woman to touch his soul, and he yearned for her to make him whole; yet at the same time, I recognised in his subconscious a sheer terror in Anne's ability reveal to him his darkest shadows; his

fallibilities, self loathing and ultimately, his helplessness in a world that Henry struggled to control absolutely.

"... And I tell you this, sweetheart," the King was speaking. Whilst distracted for a moments with these thoughts, I gave him my full attention once more. Holding a silver gilt goblet in one hand, the King extended his index finger, gesturing to emphasise his words as he continued, "Methinks that the Cardinal will never again take anything that belongs to your person." I remained silent as I imagined the dressing down that Henry must have given his first minister, furious that he thought to bring Mistress Boleyn into ill repute. I found that I could not resist the temptation to further discredit my enemy, so I said,

"Does it surprise Your Grace that the Cardinal behaved thus?" Henry put down the knife he was using to slice the venison that he was eating. He looked perplexed:

"What dost thou mean, Anne?"

"It is quite clear to me and many of your courtiers, that my Lord Cardinal would prefer a solution to Your Majesty's current difficulty which does not involve Anne Boleyn." I held Henry's gaze resolutely, for I had long since learned that what Henry respected more than anything else in the world was fearlessness.

"You are no friend of His Grace?" it was a question rather than a statement.

"Sire, forgive me my impudence if I speak out of turn, but I only desire that your subjects seek to uphold Your Grace's wishes and commands, before looking to their own advancement and glory – as any true and humble servant of Your Majesty's would endeavour to do." The King's eyes narrowed, as they often did when Henry weighed up the truth within a man's heart. I was unperturbed; I knew that I spoke the truth, for my father had often talked to me of Wolsey's desire for a match with a French princess; and of

course, I remembered what I already knew from history and I watched my words hit their target with the King. He was about to reply when suddenly, there was a knock at the door. The King glanced up anxiously as the usher approached our table. With a reverential bow, he said,

"Your Grace, Dr. Edward Foxe has come thither with news of the Pope. He seeks an audience with Your Majesty."

"Bring him in, bring him in!" the King said emphatically, as he rose to his feet in nothing short of excited anticipation. Placing my goblet down upon the table, I too stood up gracefully, placing myself at the side of the King, a petite presence next to Henry's towering frame. Dr. Foxe entered and made a deep and comely bow. Henry could not contain himself any longer. "Dr Foxe, we are right glad to see you returned to us and have long awaited your news. Tarry no more, man! Speak! What news of the Pope?" Edward Foxe raised himself up. In spite of the demanding

presence of the King, he cast an appreciative glance in my direction, which conveyed to me the great love he bore in his heart for Mistress Anne.

"Your Grace, I am delighted to report that Master Stevens and I have returned to Your Grace with a decretal commission from the Pope. This document makes good all the requests that we laid before him." Henry broke into an enormous and hearty smile; opening his arms out wide, he stepped forward grasping the relatively diminutive Dr. Foxe by the shoulders, before patting him heartily on the back in a great demonstration of rejoicing.

"Then we are truly delighted; for this news will bring to pass all the sooner everything that I could ever desire in this world." With this the King turned and came over to me, picking me up and swirling me around in an outpouring of exalted joy. Of course, I joined in wholeheartedly with the King's great happiness for I could not remember clearly the outcome of the event from my history books. I wondered if,

in some way, the course of history had shifted. I did know that there should be another five years of wrangling before Henry and Anne would finally be married. Yet, if this were true and the Pope had in fact granted such a decree then perhaps, somehow, in some way, history was about to be rewritten. So, when Henry finally allowed my tiny feet to rest back upon the floor, I too stepped forward and spoke to Dr. Foxe with great joy.

"Dr Foxe, in my most humblest wise that my heart can think, it is marvellous to my eyes that you should return in such good health. I know of the great pains and troubles that you have taken for me and for the King's Majesty and it is never like to be recompensed on my part but alone in loving you next to the King's Grace above all creatures living." With my words, Dr. Foxe yet again took my hand in his and kissed it, in one gesture declaring his great loyalty towards me. The King then spoke again,

"Dr Foxe, we command that you go at once to my Lord Cardinal. Wake him if necessary, for you are to convey to His Grace your document with our happy tidings." Understanding his charge, Dr Foxe made a bow before leaving my privy chamber, where he would be heading by barge from Greenwich towards the Strand, where Wolsey kept his estate in the opulent Durham House.

Oh, I so wanted to believe that fate had changed her mind and that Anne and Henry would be married all the sooner and enjoy an everlasting love! I cannot believe now how naive I was; how is it possible to believe so fervently in whatever we wish to be true – even when we know a different reality stares us blatantly in the face? Yet for a few short days, the King and I revelled in each other's joy and affection, exchanging gifts and tokens which spoke of our enduring love. Little did anyone know it at the time, but the spectre of death was fast approaching, casting its long shadow across the English people; it would devastate great

swathes of the population with neither mercy, nor discrimination. This idyllic time was about to be wrenched away from me in the most abrupt and cruel way possible.

Chapter Twenty One

Palace of Placentia, Greenwich

June 15, 1528

It began towards the end of May when I caught a chill. This had left me with a heavy head cold and a slight fever which kept me in my chambers for several days. Despite my obvious discomfort and annoyance that there were no painkillers to soothe my raging headache, I was not unduly disturbed or frustrated at my confinement. For outside, rain drizzled incessantly; a heavy humidity which hung in the air making it particularly troublesome to keep fresh within the many layers of clothing that it was fashionable to wear at Henry's court.

Thankfully, in the privacy of my apartments, I was kept warm enough and able to dress only in a light chemise and

black satin nightgown, one of the many gifts that I had of late received from the King. I languished in bed for three days, meticulously cared for by Bess who never left my side. Of course, the rest of my ladies were also present, coming and going as their duties to their mistress dictated. In turn, they were supervised by my mother who insisted that I drink a sweet concoction of lavender, sage, marjoram and rosewater to ease the throbbing and relentless pain in my head. Yet worse was to come when Henry sent his physician, the kindly Dr Butts, to visit me. Although I was touched by Henry's concern and easily warmed to the doctor's gentle bedside manner, after much deliberation, he prescribed the use of leeches to balance my internal humours, which Dr Butts assured me was the underlying cause of my ailment. I was sceptical and somewhat unwilling to partake of the doctor's prescribed remedy, but I knew that my aversion would be considered strange and unwholesome in Anne's world, considering that such treatment was commonplace. So, I submitted myself to the cure with considerable

revulsion, which I had tried my hardest to conceal.

After several days, I had recovered and started to receive a steady stream of visitors. It was obvious to the court that Queen Katherine's sun was now setting, and for all but her most diehard supporters, political expediency drove ever greater numbers of eager courtiers to pay their respects and form allegiances with the increasingly powerful Boleyn faction; regulars were; Sir Francis Byran, Sir Thomas Cheney, Sir John Wallop, Sir Henry Norris, William Brereton, Sir Thomas Heneage – no doubt keeping a close eye on me on behalf of Wolsey – and of course, my beloved brother, George. I was therefore not short of either entertainment or distraction, surrounded as I was by many of the most gallant and dashing gentlemen of the King's Chamber.

By mid June, I had fully regained my former strength and much to my delight, the heavy rainclouds melted away to reveal the glorious heat of the brilliant summer sun. On that

fair Tuesday morning, Henry was again preoccupied with matters of Council, sending word via my brother that we should dine together and make merry that very evening. So in the meantime, to celebrate the beauty of the day and my return to full health, my brother, Margery, Mary Norris and I decided to ride out.

The day began ordinarily enough; Bess had dressed me in a stunning new gown of royal blue silk which shimmered brilliantly when it caught the light; the bodice was cut with a low, square-neck and set with a band of gold and precious stones. Around my waist, I experimented with accessories, finally settling on a silk scarf with gold tassels which I tied about me, loosely knotted. My own dear Book of Hours was clipped on a gold chain to my girdle. The sleeves of the gown were somewhat unusual and in the German style, being closely fitted around just below the shoulders, then puffed out with slits reaching halfway below my elbows, where again the sleeve was fitted closely

to my wrists and edged with gold thread work. Beneath the fabric of my outer sleeves, puffs of fine, white linen protruded from between the cuts, whilst the underlying chemise formed a deep flounce which hung down over my hands.

After mass, our horses were brought down from the Royal stables to await us by the foot of the Tiltyard Towers. As I greeted Starlight, she whinnied, nuzzling her soft, velvety nose into my neck; I knew that she was as happy to see me as I was her. I ran my gloved hand across her jaw and felt the familiar strength of this magnificent beast beneath the delicate touch of my fingers. As I was assisted up into my gorgeous black velvet saddle, fringed and ornamented with gold fittings, I lifted my head and breathed in the sweet warm air of Midsummer. It was a joy to my soul after being so confined within my rather stuffy privy chambers for so many days. I was keen to depart and so we got on our way, as we galloped once again up Castle Hill, across

London to Dover Road, which ran close by, and on into the parkland beyond. The four of us were away from the palace for several hours, returning only well into the afternoon when we had finally become bone-tired and covered in dust and dirt from our exertions.

Perhaps we should have noticed something earlier – that the palace had been just a little quieter than the normal busy hubbub that was usually afoot around its precinct; merchants coming and going to sell their wares, the various staff of the many palace offices going about their business; clergy, nobleman, foreign visitors and ambassadors, all buzzing around the King as bees round a honey pot. I suspect that we were so engrossed with my brother who was busy regaling us with his never ending, and often highly amusing, stories about the latest pomposity and preening going on at court that we completely failed to notice that anything was amiss. Through our own laughter, we could not hear the hush that had descended ominously upon the palace

in our absence. And so, as we made our way back through the many sunlit galleries and dark corridors towards my lodgings, we were careless that death was stalking us all. However, as we approached my apartments, I knew immediately that something was gravely awry, for we were intercepted by my mother, her face ashen white. Before I had had a chance to speak, Elizabeth Boleyn said,

"Anne, you cannot go back to your chamber." She paused swallowing deeply, trying to remain calm.

"Dearest mother, what on earth has happened? What is wrong?" I reached out and put my hand upon her shoulder; Elizabeth Boleyn looked up, her hazel- brown eyes meeting mine with chilling gravity:

"The sweating sickness is back." For a moment I had no idea what she was talking about, yet my mother forged on, "Yesterday the first cases were seen in London. As you know, I took Bess with me when we visited our draper

there yesterday." By now, the chilling reality of what my mother was telling me had begun to sink in and I heard my friends gasp in horror. For unlike me, they had all lived through the last outbreak of the sweating sickness in 1525, and had seen the enormous suffering and devastation that it wreaked on the country – and the city in particular. Nobody knew what caused the sweating sickness and where it came from – even in my modern day life. Yet it was deadly, often killing its victims within a matter of a few short hours; there was no remedy, nor cure. I suddenly felt utterly helpless. I was so used to 21st century medicine, where we always had a solution, always a cure for anything that ailed me. I was young and healthy but I knew then what it was like to stand hopelessly exposed to the shadow of death. I found myself tensing, clutching at my stomach, for I sensed that my mother had more to tell.

"Bess has fallen ill...I fear she will soon die." Suddenly, and I could not help myself, tears streamed silently down my face and I realised how much I had grown to love Bess

since arriving in Anne's world; she had always been there, loyal and devoted, and for the first time, I suddenly felt truly afraid. My mother, however, was a strong woman and I could see where Anne derived her own strength of character. Taking me by the arm, she gently led me from the corridor into her adjacent chambers, along with Mary, Margery and George, and began issuing instructions with unflappable serenity and levelheadedness.

"Margery, Mary, both of you must make haste immediately. Go back to your country estates and if you can, keep well away from the city as you travel. Anne, your father is already making arrangements for our repair to Hever. As you know, he is in the country on the King's business currently, but is returning to Greenwich as quickly as possible. It is too dangerous for us to travel on the road alone, for I hear tell that there is great panic and many are fleeing from London already. I have seen it before...people do strange things when fear becomes their master." My mother shook

her head to convey her sense of disapproval – for Viscountess Rochford appreciated order, as was the Tudor way. “We are to pack, and when your father arrives, we will leave together...”

"No!" I cried out, wrenching myself away from my mother, for I needed to see Henry; he was my love and my life in this world and I was suddenly and acutely overwhelmed by a powerful and primitive urge to run to his side. Nothing could touch such a mighty Prince and my fear sought to drive me blindly into his arms, arms in which I might shelter from this raging and merciless storm. As I turned to go, my mother spoke in a firm and even tone, stopping me dead in my tracks,

"Anne, the King has gone. He asked that George follow him as soon as he returned to the palace." I could not believe what I was hearing; Henry would never leave without me – he would never abandon me. And yet, as such thoughts plagued my mind, I remembered the painful truth. The

letters of eyewitness accounts to this terrible tragedy would tell us that Henry had in fact abandoned Anne to fend for herself as best as she could. A sinister heaviness took shape within my breast. Whilst the King avowed his love for Anne Boleyn; showered her with fabulous jewels and other riches, written songs in her honour and poetry that glorified her divine womanhood, the simple and awful truth was that at the first sign of trouble, Henry had fled without her, with scant regard for her safety.

I cannot deny it; I was crushed by this first betrayal. I sank quickly into a mire of despair and disgust, and could not focus on my mother. Despite my obvious state of self-pity, she continued to talk decisively, "You must leave immediately George. The King has gone to Waltham Abbey. He requires your presence there." She opened her arms out to embrace her son, holding his handsome face between her palms, as she stared lovingly into his eyes and struggled to fight back the tears. I knew always that she adored

George and with a heavy heart, she looked upon his face as if for the last time. My brother smiled good-heartedly. Ever the gallant knight, I knew that despite George's flippancy, he would always be a man of deep substance and his noble training nurtured a proud courage within his breast. His main concern was to protect mother and me from further distress; as he said his goodbyes in turn, he urged,

"Be of good cheer ladies, for everything will be well, you will see. We shall meet again when this is over." I was the last to be embraced. As he finished saying these words, he picked up my hands as if they were the most precious thing in the world to him; kissing them, he never took his eyes from mine. In that private moment, for I knew my brother unlike any other, I saw all too easily through the mask of courage that he had worn, a mask which belied the fear he harboured for our safety. I wanted to speak but I could not find the words, and my brother unable to prolong our goodbye had turned, and with a swish of his black velvet

riding cape, he was gone. I struggled with my own vicious storm of emotions, regretting already that, stunned by the disbelief of the King's departure, I could not say all I had wanted to say to my dearly cherished brother. I stood motionless, staring at the door through which George had departed, entirely lost in my own shock and grief. It was my mother who drew me back to reality,

"Mary, Margery" my mother repeated herself, looking to each of my ladies in turn. "You both must leave now... Go! Go!" My mother gestured to shoo them away in haste. I knew that she was as fond of both of my friends as I was, and it pained her to see them go. The three of us clung to each other desperately, tears streaming down all of our faces, until my mother finally parted us and with steely resolve, Elizabeth Boleyn sent them on their way.

Finally, when my mother and I were alone, and the sorrow of being parted from my dear brother and friends gently ebbed away, I turned my attention once again to

Henry. At first, I felt that I had been engulfed by a cavernous emptiness, an oppressive sadness, the intensity of which I found hard to bear. Then, as I reflected on Henry's actions, a spark of anger ignited in the ashes of my lover's betrayal. Anne's spirit had instantaneously been ablaze with fury; I did not know which was worse, Henry's utter selfishness or lack of courage; I realised that Anne despised both with equal measure. Had I raised Henry up on a pedestal of invincible manhood or had Anne, against her better judgement, allowed herself to be mesmerised with empty words and gestures?

"Where is the Katherine," I asked my mother directly. For this question had begun to weigh heavily upon my mind. My mother held my gaze silently and in that silence I heard all that I needed to know. Henry had taken Katherine with him to Waltham Abbey, of that I was sure; the knife which had already been plunged into my heart was now twisted ruthlessly by this second act of betrayal; I realised that my love had chosen to shelter and protect his wife above me,

above Anne. I exploded into a tirade of volcanic rage and in the searing heat of my anger, I became blinded to all reason.

"How can he possibly do this to us," I opened my arms, hands outstretched as I gestured emphatically with each word in sheer frustration, "I see that I have been deceived by him! He does not love me, but uses me only to fulfil his own desires and needs." My mother looked on with desperate sadness and sympathy; and yet this only threw me into an even greater frenzy of despair, as I continued, "I cannot believe I have been such a fool!" I raised my arms to the heavens as if beseeching God for mercy. "How could I have not seen, dearest mother," I said emphatically as I swiped the air with indignation, "that Henry is no different to any man; selfish and self-obsessed."

Suddenly, I realised that I no longer knew if I were talking about myself in my modern day life with Daniel; at my utter frustration with his inability to free himself from his own chains, or was it Anne, that in her disgust with the King was

giving vent to her hot rage, for without thinking, I found myself saying, "Think on it, mother, my Lord Percy who declared to me his everlasting affection and regard, ran away with his tail between his legs like a startled alley cat the moment my Lord Cardinal and my Lord of Northumberland snapped at his heels... And now Henry, the great and mighty King of England, the Defender of the Faith, does likewise!"

"Anne, but he **is** the King and does not yet have a son to take the throne should," my mother crossed herself, "God forbid, anything happen to his Majesty."

"Mother, how can you defend him when he has just abandoned your daughter to her fate as if she were just a trifle of no matter or consequence?" My mother sighed deeply. She of course, knew me well; she knew her daughter was made of tougher stuff than any man and that, whilst Anne seethed in anger, there was little hope of

appealing to her sensibilities. I turned my back toward her and gazed out of the mullioned window toward the deserted tiltyard below. It was clear that with the departure of the King, anyone who was able was fleeing the palace; nobles retreating with their servants to the cleaner air of the country and a hope of greater solitude and safety. I wished to flee, too, back to my little home and refuge at Hever, for I had resolved that Henry would not lightly forsake me thus again; his Majesty would feel the chill of my absence and the withdrawal of my affections. As the fire in my belly began to subside and the dense mist of white-hot rage, which had clouded my mind cleared, an even more ominous sense of foreboding was rising up, reaching around me with death's icy tentacles. Unbeknownst to me at that moment, in a small room not very far away from where I was standing, Bess had succumbed to the sweat and I would never see her again.

Chapter Twenty Two

Palace of Placentia, Greenwich

June 16, 1528

In my dream, I was running blindly down the corridors of a semi-deserted palace, searching desperately from room to room to find the King. I was frantic, and yet those few souls that I met cared little for my plight; in stony silence they turned their backs on me with looks of disdain, and despite all my pleas beseeching them to help, their lithe and shadowy figures seemed to melt away into the dark recesses of unlit corridors and abandoned rooms. I was exhausted from my endless searching and yet, at last and rather strangely, I found myself entirely alone in the Queen's Presence Chamber. The empty throne that I had so often seen Katherine occupy stood before me mocking my abandonment; whilst ghosts of those who I sensed had

succumbed to sweating sickness stared on, haunting me with their eyes, which spoke only of their empty pity. I turned my head to the side, for coming from the room beyond I heard crying; soft and pitiful sobbing that had mesmerised me and drew me forth against my better judgement. At last, when I reached the doorway of the Queen's Privy Chamber, with the sound of my heart throbbing loudly in my head, I stretched out my hand and tentatively pushed it open. As I did so, the black spectre of death rushed forward to engulf me, its mouth open wide in a hollow, noiseless scream...

Suddenly my eyes flicked open. For a moment, there was utter confusion, my heart still thudded wildly in my chest and I was gripped momentarily by intense fear; all had been silent and still around me. Then slowly, by degrees, I realised that I had been dreaming, lost in the midst of a terrifying nightmare. There was a moment of acute relief as all the tension that had been gripping my body melted

away; then the grim nature of my reality began to dawn on me. The horror of the past twenty four hours flooded my mind once more; the return of sweating sickness, the hasty departure of my friends and my brother, my abandonment by Henry and finally, the death of my beloved Bess. I was not allowed to see her body of course; for fear that I might catch the deadly disease. Instead, I cried myself into a fitful sleep with great racking, exhausting sobs.

It was a dull and sombre morning which reflected perfectly the macabre events unfolding around me; brooding clouds, coloured in hues of grey weighed down the heavy skies. I awoke lying on my front, twisted up in the bedclothes, as if I had been fighting throughout the night with them for my very life. I sought to untangle myself. Lifting myself up on my elbows, I swept away my thick, tousled locks from my face as I looked about my bedchamber; the room looked desolate without Bess who, by now, would normally be busying herself, making

ready for the day ahead. I buried my face in my hands; I was heavy with grief and anger, and so I dug deep to find the courage that I needed to make it through the day. Suddenly though, I lifted my face up, cocking my head slightly to the side as I strained to listen to the sound of what seem to be muffled sobs coming from the room beyond. I realised that the crying that I had heard in my dream had wormed its way into my sleepy consciousness and had awoken me to my present reality.

My curiosity was piqued, and so I quickly turned myself around, throwing back the covers and slipping into my nightgown, which I mindlessly cast off on the floor the night before. As I made my way towards the door, I caught my reflection in the grainy mirror which hung opposite the bed. I hesitated; Anne's striking beauty was somewhat marred by swollen, red eyes which spoke deeply of my own desolation. I must admit that I was surprised by the depth of my reaction to the news of Bess's death. It

seemed to resonate with Anne's profoundly emotional nature, and I admired her unshakeable sense of loyalty and caring for those whom she loved. However, driven to uncover the source of the crying, I did not dwell on my own sorrow further. Instead, I opened my bedroom door and stepped into the main privy parlour beyond.

My mother was seated next to the fireplace and was crying inconsolably. I was deeply shocked, for I had never seen my mother so taken up with such an unbridled show of raw emotion. To my surprise, my father, who had clearly returned from the countryside, was kneeling next to her, one hand placed lovingly about her shoulders, whilst the other held her own small, delicate hand in his. For a moment I forgot about the sweating sickness, about death, about my grief and watched an intimacy pass between Anne's parents that I had ever before witnessed; if this was an advantageous, dynastic match - as was so common in the 16th century - then at some point it had blossomed into a

deep and genuine respect. I saw a genuine love between Thomas and Elizabeth Boleyn that day. Yet the spell was broken all too soon, for as the door clicked shut behind me, my father looked up, his face flushed with concern.

"Father, what has happened?" I enquired, still aware that I had not yet quite shaken off the sense of foreboding which came from my own nightmares. Sir Thomas stood up, came towards me and asked,

"Are you well, Anne?" Before I could answer, my father, who was now standing in front of me, put one hand across my brow and with the other, gently lifted my chin and looked with great concern into my eyes.

"Yes... I think so." I frowned, shaking my head ever so slightly, still trying to clear the grogginess that clouded my mind. It took me a few moments to realise that my father had still not answered my question and so I pressed him again, "What has happened?...Mother?" I looked over at my Lady

Mother, beseeching her to tell me the truth. Sir Thomas spoke first.

"Your brother has fallen ill with the sweat. A messenger came from the King's household at Waltham Abbey this very morning." Like any 16th century nobleman, my father was hardened to death and dying, and no doubt had seen much of it in his lifetime. He was not a squeamish man and yet, with his only surviving son at death's door, I heard the tension lace his voice and I sensed the depth of his own, black pain.

"Oh George, dearest brother..." I said to myself softly, as I sank down to sit on a nearby stool; yet as I did so, I suddenly remembered myself, suddenly remembered all that I already knew. How could I become so lost in this drama whose ending I already had knowledge of? My first and only thought had been to comfort my mother and so I hastened to her side, sinking to my knees, much as my father had done only a few moments before. I squeezed her hands gently in mine, beseeching her to look into my eyes and to trust my

words even though I knew that I could not explain to her the certainty of my knowing. "My dear, dear mother, do not fret so, for I know with all my heart that George will recover and be entirely well again. I promise you that; you will see him again soon."

Yet as I uttered these very words, I could not wipe from my mind that if history were to run true to course, then very shortly Anne and her father would also fall ill. I must admit, I did not relish this prospect in the slightest and yet I took heart, for I knew that both would recover and that soon all would be well again. Of course, I was correct, Anne would indeed be well again. Yet I had not reckoned with the cold-blooded fate that lay in store for me.

Due to my insistence that we see Bess properly buried, and on account of the distress experienced both by my mother and I, my father pragmatically decided to sit tight for a few days before setting out on our return to Hever. We minimised

contact with the outside world, whilst my father kept up a steady stream of correspondence with the King and the court, first at Waltham Abbey, then Hunsdon. Through these letters, we soon found out that George had fallen ill almost immediately upon arrival at Waltham. Predictably, the disease had swept through his body with rampant speed, yet death found no home there, and within two days he had considerably recovered, enough to write to my parents with great assurance of his health.

It was the fourth day after Bess' death; with all our belongings packed and our affairs in order, we were ready to depart. I was about to leave my chambers when a messenger arrived from the King's household. With no servants to attend us, I took delivery of the King's message in person, dismissing the young man with a crown for his trouble. I paid little attention to his pallor; the beads of sweat forming upon his brow, or the look of agitation alight in his eyes. At the time, I put it all down to the

gruelling ride, taken at full pace no doubt, to deliver the King's message swiftly into the hands of Mistress Boleyn. How foolish I was! How careless!

Having dismissed the young gentleman, I turned away from the doorway, making my way to my writing desk. Sinking into the chair, I paused for a moment looking down at the letter I held in my hand; the now familiar stiff parchment was sealed with the Royal Seal, which kept secret Henry's own privy thoughts. However, on this occasion, I was slightly apprehensive; I wondered what Henry would have to say to me. For I confess that a day earlier, having initially ignored the King's daily ministrations requesting news of my health, I had finally written a rather stern letter to Henry expressing my displeasure and hurt at having been abandoned by him without any care for my well-being.

I boldly questioned his true feelings and commitment towards me – in short Anne's fiery indignation had got the

better of me once more. In the cold light of day, somewhat sheepishly, I privately questioned overstepped the mark – stretching the King's patience to beyond its limits. However, yet again, I had underestimated the potency of our love to smooth away disquiet and sweeten the bitter pill which I had forced his Majesty to swallow. Finally, taking a deep breath, I opened the letter with my finger and began to read,

To my mistress.

The uneasiness my doubts about your health gave me, disturbed and alarmed me exceedingly, and I should not have had any quiet without hearing certain tidings. But now, since you have as yet felt nothing, I hope, and am assured that it will spare you, as I hope it is doing with others. For when we were at Waltham Abbey, two ushers, two valet de chamber, and your brother, fell ill, but are now quite well; and since we have returned to your house at Hunsdon, we have been perfectly well, and have not, at present, one sick person, God be praised; and I think, if you would retire from Surrey, as we did, you would escape all danger. There is another thing that may comfort you, which is, that, in truth, in this distemper few or no women have been taken

ill, and, what is more, no person of our court, and few elsewhere, have died of it.

For which reason I beg you, my entirely beloved, not to frighten yourself, nor be too uneasy in our absence; for, wherever I am, I am yours, and yet we must sometimes submit to our misfortunes, for whoever will struggle against fate is generally but so much the farther from gaining his end: wherefore comfort yourself, and take courage, and avoid the pestilence as much as you can, for I hope shortly to make you sing, 'le renvoye'. No more at present, for lack of time, but that I wish you in my arms, but I might a little dispelled your unreasonable thoughts.

Written by the hand of him who is and always will be yours,
Im-H.R-mutable.

I remained motionless staring at the letter; I realised that I was filled with a sense of relief that the King and I remained perfect lovers. Oh, how I adored these messages of love and longing, spawned from Henry's own hand; a task which he undertook with great disdain for others and yet in writing to me, to Anne, I only ever sensed great thoughtfulness and tenderness. Yet, I could never read one

of Henry's letters without a heavy sadness trailing behind in its wake; for Henry's protestations of immutable love would ultimately prove to be only empty words. Not for the first time, I wondered exactly when would be the turning point in Henry and Anne's relationship; when would Henry's love sour and turn to hate, when would his desire turn to revulsion, and when would his longing turn to indifference.

I folded the letter carefully, placing it in my purse; I also made a note to myself to put it with the others upon my arrival at Hever. In retrospect, somebody, probably my mother, must have done so on my behalf, for by the time I arrived at Hever, the sweating sickness would have taken hold of my body with vicious potency and terrible consequences.



I remember very little of what happened to me after I left

Greenwich. It started with an ominous sense of foreboding that something terrible was about to happen; the like of which I have never experienced before. I swear to God that I thought that I was going to die and yet, for a short time, all had seemed well. Then there was a little pain in my head and chest and by the time we arrived at Hever Castle, I was drenched in the most terrible sweat. I vaguely remember my father carrying me up to my bedchamber with no regard for his own well-being. Although the fever was reaching such a pitch that I knew I was becoming delirious, my mind was coherent enough to beg him to get away from me, for I feared for his life.

It is strange that in such extreme circumstances, I remember more than anything that I was just so glad to be home; if I were to die, I wanted to die there – that idyllic place that had so gently nurtured me as I had found my way in Anne's world. I thought of my dear friends, of my brother and of Henry; their faces, voices and my memories

swimming in and out of my consciousness. Within two short hours of the first onset of symptoms, I began to lose focus, as I slipped helplessly into unconsciousness. The last thing that I remember seeing was my mother leaning over me, shaking me violently. I knew that she was trying to keep me awake, for it was well told that the chances of survival were greater if the patient did not lapse into sleep. Echoing some way off in the distance, I could hear her desperate, final pleas,

“Anne, Anne...dear child, wake up!”

That was the last thing I remember. Everything suddenly collapsed rapidly into blackness, and in that moment, I lost all that I had come to know and love so dearly.

Part Three

Chapter One

Heber Castle

June 21, 2007

"I think she's coming round," said the calm, disembodied voice which softly pricked my awareness. Suddenly, I felt my eyelid being lifted gently and a bright light flashed painfully in my right eye. I flinched automatically, twisting my head away from the light which blinded me and caused a searing pain to tear through my skull. I remember that I felt as though I was suffocating, although I couldn't understand why at first. Then as I began to regain my footing in the world, I was aware of something covering my nose and mouth and half conscious, I tried to reach up and tear it away from my face. However, my hand was caught and the disembodied voice spoke evenly to me once more, "It's all right, Anne. It is just an oxygen mask... You collapsed and

passed out but you're in safe hands now, everything will be all right. We will have you to hospital in no time."

'Hospital': I couldn't understand what they were telling me. I fought valiantly to bring my mind into focus, as I couldn't make any sense of what was happening. But each time I surfaced above the swell of unconsciousness, I seemed to be dragged back down into its depths once more. Fragments of memories were interwoven with a mutable reality which seemed to slip and slide in and out of my grasp, changing form and leaving me lost in a labyrinth of confusion.

Suddenly, my mind alighted on what I was struggling to remember, the reason for my passing out in the first place - the sweating sickness; I recalled how I had fallen ill on my journey back to Hever from Greenwich Palace; I remembered my father carrying me to my bedchamber and my mother, yes...my mother; I heard myself cry out for her.

"Mother...!" I tried to speak but I could hardly form the

words, and they came forth in nothing more than a parched whisper.

"It's okay, Anne. We are here to look after you and you will be fine now." I forced my eyelids to flicker open and saw that leaning over me was a young, dark haired woman whom I did not recognise. I must have looked incredibly confused because she was dressed in clothes that for a few seconds, I couldn't place; they seemed so alien to me. The woman smiled down at me reassuringly and spoke again,

"Anne, you're at Hever Castle. Do you remember being here? I struggled to focus through the grogginess and pain which dominated my senses. I managed to nod before she continued, "You were taken ill and somebody called an ambulance. I think you may have had a fit and we need to get you to hospital to find out what has caused it. Do you understand me?" I nodded again, almost imperceptibly. But already beyond the veil of my incapacity, a knot of panic was forming in my stomach. A slow and painful

realisation was taking shape in my mind; a realisation that somehow I had been ripped away from the 16th century and that, without my desire or consent, I had been sucked back into my modern day life.

Slowly, I was lifted onto a stretcher and carried with some considerable difficulty down through familiar rooms, corridors and staircases of the castle. I strained my neck to catch a glimpse of the home which had become my sanctuary, the idyll that I had grown to love so dearly during my time spent in Anne's world. It was difficult to do, not least because of the blinding pain which had suddenly returned with such ferocity. As I was gently manoeuvred down the main staircase, I managed to regain my senses sufficiently to catch sight of the portraits of Anne, and Mary Boleyn in the main Entrance Hall. Anne stared out at me enigmatically. Her face was so familiar to me now that the image was no longer a flat, two- dimensional portrait but a vibrant, living entity, who shared all my untold

secrets. This hallway had been the place in which my adventure had begun and I simply couldn't believe that I had lost her.

A torrent of tumultuous thoughts swirled through my mind, fighting their way through the pain which insistently throbbed in my head; thoughts of the people that I had grown to love and now feared that I may never see again. Tears began to flow down my face; I didn't have the strength to cry out in grief. They saw my tears and thought I was afraid for myself. They couldn't know, of course, the true reason for my distress and although they tried to soothe my anxieties, as I was carried away in the ambulance, I was inconsolable; I could not bear the thought of leaving behind my beloved Hever and my ghostly family, who had, over twelve glorious months, had become my world.

I felt I was dying. As we sped along narrow country lanes towards the nearest city hospital, excruciating pain and overwhelming surges of nausea washed over me. I had never experienced a headache like it before and I vomited

several times; the retching only intensified the pain until I cried out in blinding agony. The lady talked about giving me something to relieve the agony and alleviate my sickness. Thankfully, she didn't wait for me to respond because I just wasn't able to do so. I was vaguely aware of something being injected through the needle in a vein at my elbow. Within minutes, I felt a blissful release as the intense, white hot pain which tore through my head, and the associated sickness, began to abate. For a time, I must have slipped once again into unconsciousness. Faces with whom I had become so familiar: Henry; Elizabeth and Thomas Boleyn, my sister, Mary, my brother, George, Nan, Margery, my uncle Norfolk and even Cardinal Wolsey slipped in and out of focus. Each spoke to me earnestly and with great urgency across time. I felt they were trying to hold onto me, but I couldn't form the words to respond to their pleas. I reached out towards them, imploring them to help me; but every time I did, they faded into shadows and I was alone once more.

Our arrival at the hospital was a blur of white light; a parade of well-meaning, concerned faces whose voices continued to drone in and out of my awareness. I was cognizant of being rushed into what looked like a scanner of some sort, then not long after, meeting a fair-haired man who introduced himself as Mr. Harris. He told me that he was the consultant neurosurgeon on call, and that he would be taking over my care. I remember his kind face leaning over me, gently squeezing my hand, explaining carefully that I had a cerebral aneurysm which had ruptured and was bleeding into my brain, and that they needed to operate on me as a matter of urgency to seal off the leaking blood vessel.

I was being prepped for theatre when the nursing staff asked me for my next of kin. I tried to speak, to tell them that I was an orphan in this world with no siblings; to tell them about Daniel - but I was too weak and confused. I heard myself say his name aloud, but as hard as I tried to remember his other details, they simply and frustratingly lay just beyond my

grasp. The last thing I recall was scrawling my signature on a consent form for the operation. Then I was subsumed into the inky blackness once more.

It was all a blur, a frenetic whirl of activity that swept me along in its wake. After it was all over, Mr. Harris told me that I was lucky to have survived, although he had found the ruptured aneurysm easily enough, and repaired it without complications. For a few days apparently, I had precariously teetered on the delicate edge between life and death; the unknown frontier of what lies beyond this material world was almost tangible to me in my semi-conscious state. Fate, however, played her hand. Just as I was aware that in my 16th century life, Anne had been spared from sweating sickness, so too, miraculously, had I been spared from my own brush with death.

Within a few days of my surgery, I had improved so much and was able to give the hospital staff the names and contact details of friends - and of Daniel. I was overwhelmed by

the huge outpouring of love, thoughtfulness and generosity from those very same friends who visited me in a steady stream, surrounding me with flowers, cards, their love and prayers for my recovery. Oh, and so often I was told just how fortunate I was to be alive! Yet, they were all blissfully unaware of the two secrets that I harboured close to my breast.

The first was my unbelievable sojourn into Anne's world. I still couldn't decide if I would tell anyone about it; I could not bear the thought that on hearing such a fantastical story, my friends would dismiss it as the ramblings of a sick brain – and indeed, who would blame them for coming to such a conclusion? Even I had moments when I questioned whether it was true. Yet all that I had known seemed more real to me than the world in which I then found myself. And whilst on some days, I thought I must surely be going mad, I knew in my heart that what I had experienced was not a figment of my imagination.

My second secret was that my surgeon had sat down on the side of my bed three days after the operation. By that time, I was well out of immediate danger, and certainly well enough to listen and respond to his words. He gently told me that the aneurysm which had caused the bleeding into my brain had been repaired and was unlikely to cause me any further problems. However, the brain scan revealed that there was another one of similar size, unfortunately this time buried much deeper in the brain tissue. There was no way that it could safely be reached surgically. I remember the sadness in his eyes as he gently broke the news that there was a significant chance that this, in turn, may also ultimately rupture and because of its location, there might be no way of stemming the bleeding. There was a significant risk that I may die as a result. I suppose I should have been shocked, grief stricken, even. But I was not. I was left with only a sense of guilt for the ease with which I had abandoned any concern or ties to my modern day life; for it is true to say

that at that time, I felt that my life was already bereft without Anne and Henry.

I had lain for hours at a time in my clean, starched hospital bed simply staring at the ceiling, lost in an entirely different world; a world which was way beyond the imagining of those who surrounded me. Later, when I was somewhat better and daily cajoled to get up and about, I would sit staring out of the window of my private room. So many times in those few weeks, I closed my eyes and desperately tried to transport myself from my modern day life. I willed myself to catch hold of the wings of time, so that I could be swept back to my love; back to the life which had become my own. Of course, it was a fruitless quarry and I could do little to hide the cavernous blackness that engulfed and weighed down heavily on me. Indeed, sometimes it was so oppressive that often I found it difficult to breathe, struggling to hold the space long enough for my grief to unravel itself.

As much as I tried, my melancholia could not be entirely

concealed. Consequently, I was referred to a psychiatrist, who rather predictably diagnosed that I was depressed, erroneously attributing it to my sudden illness and the doctor's dire warnings for my future health. Yet in truth, I cared very little for my own health. In those early days, I was single-minded in my thinking, and nothing, simply nothing, mattered to me except getting back to Henry, my Tudor family and friends. I admit that I was strangely obsessed by this more extraordinary life. I remember wishing that the hospital staff would leave me alone with my memories. So, it was at that moment that I decided to put up a facade of normality - the perfect patient, optimistic and responsible. This deception suited my purpose. As my strength grew, I increasingly yearned to return to Hever. I thought that if there was anywhere that I might cross back into my old life, then surely it would be there.

Chapter Two

Greenwich, London

July 10, 2007

Two weeks later, I was well enough to be discharged from hospital. In my final debrief from my consultant, I was given strict instructions to rest and take it easy for the next few weeks; something, I confess, I had little intention of doing. Mr. Harris made it clear to me that as a result of the bleeding and the surgery to stem it, I might experience complications such as seizures, or future intracranial bleeding. I knew what to look out for and when to ask for help. So, armed with my outpatient appointment for four weeks hence, I was busy finally packing my few, personal belongings when my dear friend, Kate appeared in the doorway of my hospital room.

"Anyone need a taxi!" she exclaimed. I smiled warmly when I saw my friend standing in the doorway; her thick, dark brown hair swept back off her face by her Dior sunglasses. She looked effortlessly chic and casual in a crisp white blouse and slim fitting jeans. I mused that Kate always looked immaculate, no matter what the occasion, and I often looked on with friendly envy at her perfectly groomed nails, flawless skin and radiant complexion. With just three months age difference between us, Kate had been a friend ever since we both found ourselves working in the same high pressured, ruthless environment some ten years earlier. She was a pragmatic, kind-hearted woman with a razor sharp, incisive wit and from the very earliest days, we recognised each other as kindred spirits.

I suspect that our friendship subsequently flourished, catalysed by the need for us both to take refuge in what we then perceived to be the only other sane person in the office. Our friendship, I suppose, started as a safety valve,

allowing us to release pressure when faced with the mindless autocracy and egotistical behaviour of those who led the company for which we worked – and who frankly should have known better. Ten years on, our friendship was substantial, its deep roots providing a solid foundation that no doubt would last a lifetime; it was a lifetime that in the end, I see with irony, was to be much shorter than I ever anticipated.

With a beaming smile, Kate threw open her arms and came towards me, scooping me up in an embrace which spoke of her pure joy and relief to see her friend finally well enough to be going home. I hugged her generously in return, for although my heart ached with grief, I was beginning to learn to conceal it well and indeed, there was a sense of gladness about the idea of finally escaping the clinical austerity of my small hospital room.

"Boy, am I happy to see you! I can't tell you what a relief it is to be finally getting out of here; I have been so bored!" I

cried out, throwing my hands up in mock despair. However, this was only a half truth. The mindless monotony of hospital life had suited me to a degree, allowing me to sink into an effortless rhythm that required little active engagement on my part. I confess that I indulged myself entirely in my lost life. Perhaps I was somewhat reckless in doing so; perhaps I should have turned my back on my secret adventure and thrown myself head first into whatever life I had left in the present. But I did not; my Tudor life had become my preoccupation.

Kate waited until I finished my packing and I put away the last lonely remnants of my institutionalised life. Perched casually on the edge of my bed, I was aware, out of the corner of my eye, that Kate had cocked her head to the side; a small furrow appearing in her brow. Eventually she tentatively broached a subject that she knew was not an easy one for me,

"Have you heard from Daniel?" I paused for a moment, but without looking up, I continued with my task and replied nonchalantly,

"He's been in on a few occasions – when he could." I noticed immediately the ever-present need to justify his actions, or more often, the lack of them. Probably for the thousandth time in our relationship, I pushed away the reality of our situation; like Henry, Daniel was married to another woman. Together they had a child – a little girl called Jemima – who was the ever present wedge dividing us. I put the last of the things in my case and reached round to zip up the weekend bag that went everywhere with me when I travelled. I paused again momentarily, before turning to look at my friend. "He's coming over this afternoon. I think Rose is away with work, and Jemima is at school."

"And what did he say about...that?" Kate gestured toward me, nodding meaningfully towards my scalp

which, of course, was now shaven across one side of my skull and which sported a frightful scar beneath the crisp white bandages. Of course, I knew she was not referring to any reaction that Daniel might have toward my physical appearance, that would heal in time; rather that she wondered whether the prospect of losing me might have brought his painful dilemma into sharp focus and catalysed a shift in the stalemate which had been going on for five long years. Oh yes, if anyone knew how Anne felt about the waiting game, it was me.

I shrugged my shoulders, shaking my head almost imperceptibly, as I tried to make sense – first and foremost to myself – of the terrible mess that we seemed to have entangled ourselves within. Oftentimes, I longed to talk to my friends of my relationship with the man that had captured my heart so completely, of the tearing, searing and desolate pain of being unable to be with the person that you love. Yet many of my friends did not even know about our

illicit relationship because I feared their harsh judgement. It is not that I lied to them, rather just artfully dodged any conversation which touched on matters of love. It was true though, no matter which way you looked at it, there was no escaping the fact that I had become a master of deception and was not proud of it. However, I was grateful for the easy acceptance of my friends who did know of the situation in which I had become embroiled. Yet I soon understood that with the exception of Kate, who had personal experience with a similar situation before we were friends, it was impossible for people to comprehend the exquisite torture of prolonged separation; particularly when the person who chose to prolong that separation was your lover. I answered my friend who was waiting patiently for my reply.

"Oh, you know Daniel, always a pragmatist... just like you!" I smiled at Kate, picking up a light sweater that lay folded at the end of my bed. Slipping it over my head, I adjusted the sleeves, taking a moment to pause before going on, "In truth,

I think it shook him badly...and I don't actually remember much of his first visit." I circled my hand in the air as if trying to pluck my fragile memories from beyond my conscious awareness. "I vaguely remember him here and I think there were tears in his eyes. He was telling me he loved me, over and over; that I was the best thing that has happened to him since the birth of his daughter." I looked down at my bag still resting on top of my bed. I found myself mindlessly playing with the leather handle, running my finger up and down its smooth form, lost in the rather foggy recollection of seeing Daniel again for the first time.

I remember that I'd opened my eyes and for a split second there was something familiar about the face; it reminded me of Henry and I thought that I was home. Then the details of Daniel's facial features came into focus and I recalled my present predicament. He was stroking my brow with his thumb; his face close to mine and I could see that his eyes were glistening with emotion. A single tear spilled over and

chased its way down his cheek. I remember little else, except that to see him ache for me in that way was like drinking from crystalline waters after walking in the desert of my aloneness for so long. In my confusion, I toyed with the rather obvious notion that I deserved to be shown so much more love than Daniel seemed capable of; I realised why Henry's adoration had been such an intoxicating elixir to someone who for so long had received only crumbs of affection from my lover's table. Even the memory of it now hurts. Not the fact that the man that I loved was so cruel and thoughtless, but that I had ever allowed anyone to abuse me with so little regard for my own self-respect. It is so easy to see it all now in stark and painful clarity; but back then I would have endured a thousand cuts before I even considered casting him aside. Suddenly, Kate spoke again,

"You think he might finally pull his head out from up his own arse and actually do something?" I realised that this was as much a statement as a question. In between my

daydreams of Henry, my family and friends and the beautiful Tudor palaces which I had come to know as my home, I must confess that I asked myself this question on numerous occasions. Perhaps it all happened for a reason far beyond my knowing? Perhaps this would finally wake Daniel up to his own impotence? At this stage, foolishly, I did not seriously consider the possibility that I was lost hopelessly in my own fantasy of happy-ever-afters; that in time, it would be me who would wake up to my own folly.

Whilst in the 16th century, Anne had recovered from the sweating sickness and her destiny was continuing to roll inexorably forward toward her fate; in my world, without my knowing, I had also begun on the path which would take me relentlessly toward my own unhappy ending. With little else to say, Kate picked up my bag and linking her arm about mine, I left my hospital room for the final time. I headed out back into my modern day life, grieving and disoriented and with no idea about how I was going to come to terms with what had happened to me.

Once Kate helped me unpack and said her final goodbyes, I was left alone in my apartment with the privacy that I had craved for so long. There was no question in my mind about what I wanted to do next; I made straight for my bookshelves and the quite extensive library of Tudor reference books, which I very proudly possessed. During my time in Anne's world there were so many intriguing characters and events that I could remember little about from my own reading of history. I contemplated the fact that I had no idea if my adventure was over, whether I would ever see the 16th century again. However, if I was to do so, I was determined to be ready, to know all that I could about the pivotal characters in Anne' story. I was determined to take the opportunity to fill in all the gaps in my knowledge, for my curiosity was by then, insatiable, boarding on obsessive. It was also the closest that I was able to come to touching the life that had been my own, a life I had shared with the remarkable woman who daily haunted

my dreams.

An unloved pile of letters that had been collected by my friends during my stay in hospital had been placed on the table in my kitchen, awaiting my attention. These, and an inbox full of e-mails, had all gone untouched. Before I knew it, I found myself kneeling in front of an array of history books, which I hoped would contain answers to so many of my burning questions. I ran my fingertips across shiny spines, aesthetically so much less pleasing than the vellum bound books which, as Anne Boleyn, I had begun to establish in my own little, private collection of religious and devotional works. Yet one book of all of those in front of me caught my eye and drew me to lift it from the shelf. I turned it over several times in my hands, examining it. It was a rather meticulous and chunky biography of Anne's life and I knew that this was the place where I would begin to find my answers.

I made my way to a rather well-worn, and much loved, leather armchair which was bathed in warm, afternoon sunlight. It was my favourite reading chair and I passed many happy hours there, transported to other worlds by the stories in which I happily lost myself. I sank into its familiar embrace, and opening the book I began to devour it, page by page. There is no doubt that I was thirsty for its knowledge, paying attention to so many of the little details that in previous times would have faded into the background as trifles of little significance. In other cases, where the details had vanished in the sands of time completely, I would find myself filling them. As I followed familiar events, moved through the palaces I had come to know intimately, I recreated them all vividly in the theatre of my mind; the sight of flickering shadows cast by torchlight in darkened corridors, the sweet smell of the beeswax candles lighting my apartments, the warmth of Henry's skin pressed against my own.

Naturally, I found myself drawn to the part of Anne's story which I had so recently witnessed; the outbreak of sweating sickness in London. From there, I soon became completely subsumed in events as they unfurled, one after the other. Each character had become such a vivid part of my life that I watched as they emerged from the mists of time to greet me once more. I read of how their stories unfolded, each playing their part in shaping and defining Anne's fate. Yet these were no longer just names recorded on paper, but living, breathing beings whom I could reach out and touch across the centuries that had then separated us; I heard the sound of their voices, smelt the scent of their skin, knew how they walked, the secrets of their hearts, which had long since been dispersed by the wind; I remembered well the warm smiles of my friends, or the ever present danger spoken of silently in the accusatory stares of my sworn enemies. With each name, I felt a rising swell of emotion that defined each relationship; feelings of love, loyalty, fierce protection, resentment or anger. Before

long, I entirely lost track of the time, as I was washed downstream in the relentless current of events which hurtled through Anne's life. So much so, that when Daniel rang my doorbell some time later, I was completely startled to find that three hours had evaporated in an instant. Hurriedly, putting away my books, for I did not yet feel ready to share my incredible story with anyone, I made my way back down the corridor. Taking the door off the latch, I opened it to find my love standing in front of me.

I could not help it; each time I saw him, my heart filled with joy. Instantly, I became exquisitely aware of his presence; Henry was the only other man able to stir my senses in the same heady and intoxicating way. Not for the first time, would I feel that in some unfathomable way, Daniel and I had met before. That this drama we were playing out was all too familiar, However, I admit that at that time, I still thought this to be a matter of pure co- incidence. It would only be later, when I returned to Anne's world for the

second time that I would find out the real truth behind our relationship. Shaking away these troubling thoughts, I stepped aside to usher Daniel in; and once within the privacy of my own little sun-lit hallway, he set down the leather briefcase he carried and scooped me up in a loving embrace.

We kissed tenderly, my love stroking my hair, searching my face as if he had just found something dear and precious, which he feared he might lose. When I was with Henry, in his arms, I wondered so very often how I would feel if I were to ever find myself in Daniel's embrace again. I was afraid that my love for him would have dissolved in my passion for the King. Now, I was entirely confused. I yearned to see Henry again as he had undoubtedly drawn me in to his lair and I seem bound by an inexplicable and invisible force which held Anne – and me – firmly in its seduction embrace. Yet all my most profound emotions for Daniel were evidently intact, for I melted into his arms with

the same glorious relief I had always known.

"How long do we have?" I asked him, burying my head against his chest; it was a place I always felt safe and could hide from the brutal reality of our predicament. To some people the question may have appeared strange, but to Daniel and me, whose story depended constantly upon precious moments of stolen time, it was entirely normal and he knew exactly what I meant.

"A couple of hours. I need to leave around four o'clock to pick up Jemima from school." I felt my stomach tighten, as it always did when he spoke of his family. I tried so very hard to be gracious. For I knew, in truth, that his daughter meant the world to him; for whilst I loved Daniel with every fibre of my being, I had no desire to be the catalyst that would turn his relationship with his daughter upside down. Perhaps like anybody who falls hopelessly in love, we never planned for it to be this way – or for it to be so utterly

destructive.

Daniel and I met casually through work, almost six years ago. At the time, he was another consultant at the firm in which I was employed. In those early days, our paths rarely crossed. However, what I noticed in retrospect was that when they did, there was delightful ease in our relationship. It is difficult to put my finger on it now, and in truth, I thought very little of it at the time, but I think that I always had a sense of being profoundly safe when Daniel was near me. Despite this, we certainly did not seek each other out, as I suspect is true of many relationships; in the end, it had been an unplanned, brief encounter which catalysed an explosion of desire which took both of us by surprise.

By chance, we found ourselves thrust together on a course which was to last for four days. Neither of us knew any of other of the attendees, and so that evening, we found ourselves drinking alone in the hotel bar. It was a good opportunity to get to know each other better - perhaps even

forge a friendship, a new ally at work. In retrospect, I think it was probably my fault that it started, although my intention was innocent enough. With a glass of perfectly chilled champagne inside me, I was feeling mischievous and flirtatious; like Anne, I knew well how to excite a man's interest and passion, and I felt playful beyond words. I was aware of my coquettish behaviour, which perhaps in times gone by would have been considered part of the innocent game of courtly love. Yet, just as Anne's mastery of the art would eventually provide her enemies with the ammunition to bring her down, so my innocent flirtation unknowingly ignited the spark which would blow both our previously innocent worlds apart.

By the time we left the course, just four short days later, the stage for our own drama had been well and truly set. I guess that we had both enjoyed feeling desired and revelled in playing with our new-found sense of being fully alive. Just as with Henry, the attention was addictive. But like most

addictions in the beginning, we carelessly felt that we could end it whenever we pleased. Over the next few weeks, however, we fell hopelessly in love with one another – and at a frightening speed. It never really occurred to us that the potent mix of sexual chemistry that was developing would be too strong for us to control. Our primitive biology was mixing a truly intoxicating elixir of lust and passion that eventually drove us into each other's arms. Perhaps I should have felt guilty, but largely I did not. The beauty of the love which subsequently grew from the fertile earth between us was too radiant, pure and joyful for it to be sullied by feelings of remorse.

In the many intimate moments that subsequently stretched before us, Daniel explained to me that whilst deeply fond of his wife, he probably had never truly loved her. Theirs had long ago become one of brotherly and sisterly affection; an ever increasingly practical arrangement, centred on the needs and duty towards their infant daughter. Daniel was no cad;

he had never strayed before. Yet, I think that his thirst for love, affection and intimacy paved the way for him to fall willingly into our relationship.

The pattern is so clear for me to see in retrospect. To Daniel, I was the same exotic, sensual and stimulating creature that Anne had been to Henry. In truth, I made Daniel feel alive again after years of being buried in the colourless frigidity of his wife. I see now, how he too craved the same exhilaration, to feel the full force of life throbbing through his veins. Time was one thing that Henry could never control; yet Anne had turned back the clock for him, reinvigorating his lusty youth. Anne Boleyn would ever be a complex, magnetic, provocative being who engaged the alpha male in Henry deeply and without reserve. Like Henry and Anne, Daniel and I soon realised that we, too, were soul mates. He often lamented the fact that we had not met years earlier, before he was married. I shared his regret, yet I knew that if we had, we would have not been ready for each other and probably

would have passed like ships in the night.

But it was true that Daniel and I were undoubtedly enthralled by each other; there was a perfect fit between our bodies, as if we had been carved from the same stone, two halves of a whole, one waiting to find the other. We longed to be together, just as Henry and Anne had over six, long, frustrating years in their relationship. Yet Daniel's sense of duty to his daughter would keep him locked in a marriage which no longer nourished or sustained him. I knew the reason why; he was petrified that by ending his relationship with Rose, Jemima would feel abandoned and be destroyed by what he considered to be an act of selfishness. For myself, I felt utterly torn; I admired his fierce loyalty and commitment to the choices that he had made in his life before we had met, yet at other times I wanted to scream at him; I was so angry with Daniel, and with the world, for driving this wedge between us. Sometimes, I loved him and hated him in equal measure and

would often heap further suffering upon myself, despising my selfishness, whilst also simmering with fury for his lack of courage to end his marriage. Indeed, during my sojourn in Anne's world, I had already begun to taste with sickening familiarity the same bitter mix of frustration and contempt for Henry as I had with

Daniel; her pain was so often my own, as I watched the King vacillate endlessly and fail to take decisive action to rid himself of Katherine.

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other out, as I suspect is true of many relationships; in the end, it had been an unplanned brief encounter which catalysed an explosion of desire which took both of us by surprise.

Our love had been fiercely intense and passionate, in a way that I suspect some people never experience in a lifetime. However, the momentum of our relationship at that point was demanding more of us; it was urging us evermore toward a deeper and more meaningful commitment. We had fallen in love and by then, we needed to ground it in a more substantial way. I was ready, Daniel was not. But a storm was brewing; one that I entirely failed to see coming. Six months into our relationship, everything changed and I foolishly refused to accept its significance. I didn't know, nor would I ever have believed, what happened next.

Daniel sensed that to continue headlong in our relationship as it was, would inevitably destroy the security which he had so carefully constructed around his

daughter. The inner turmoil of his conflicting values and desires were slowly but surely tearing him apart. No matter how much he loved me, it was increasingly difficult for him to look at himself in the mirror with any sense of integrity; and this had scared me; but naïvely, I felt that our love would see us through. Nearly seven months into our relationship, Daniel headed off on holiday with his family and pathetically, I was inconsolable; the pain unbearable. I felt devastated that in so obvious a way, he was choosing to be without me. It wasn't that I felt jealous of his wife; for how could I? In many ways, I felt sorry for her for being with a man who no longer, perhaps had never, loved her. But I longed to be with him, and although I tried to be brave, I faced the prospect of being cut-off from him without contact for the first time in months with enormous dread and great heaviness in my heart. Just as Henry often held me and reassured me that his public appearances with Katherine meant nothing to him, so had Daniel held me and told me that all would be well, that he would be back very

soon. However, this would be the first lie, the first betrayal. Two weeks later when he did finally come back, I had lost my love.

Ostensibly, nothing had changed and we greeted each other with the same exuberance and passion as always. However, I soon became aware that something was dreadfully wrong. It was so strange. We shared the same deep, searching intimacy when, as we had always done, we spoke of the same hopes and dreams., Yet suddenly, the music that he used to send me that defined the story of our love, the poetry that he wrote for me in my honour, the text messages he would send, the long phone calls made from his office on evenings and weekends, abruptly ceased. I remember being so confused, desperately casting about, imploring him with my actions and words to meet me again, as we always had, in our field of dreams. I knew with all my heart that his love for me was unchanged and I longed for him to show that to me once more. Yet it was never to be. In

many ways, it would have been better had we ended the relationship right then, rather than drag us through the agony of the next six years. But that was not our fate.

Looking back, I now realise that he could not live without me, and yet he could never commit to be with me; he was utterly trapped by his own overwhelming fear; patterns long since laid down in the shadowy corridors of a difficult childhood. I saw that the invitation that our love created had become too overwhelming for him and that Daniel had to retreat behind large, defensive walls, to emerge only on his terms. Although it was a unilateral decision, I threw myself into what was always going to be a hopeless cause, to reclaim our love. In truth, I simply could not believe that he would abandon me – and I had felt utterly abandoned. Instead, I fought with every fibre of my being to preserve the tender and precious love that had flourished between us. In the end, the intense sadness and stress of our predicament which had endured over many months, began to

take its toll on my health. I no longer slept well at night, and when one night I laid my head upon the pillow and felt my whole body shaking, I knew then that it had gone too far. For my own sanity, I had to find a way out. But it would not be easy because our paths crossed increasingly at work as we shared projects and clients.

I did my best to turn away, but from the moment I did so, Daniel began to re-engage with our relationship; once more lavishing upon me the tenderness and affection that I craved, but thought that I had lost. And so, I would be drawn back in to the drama, once again to become the centre of his world and the object of his burgeoning affection. For a short time, everything would be perfect again; then overwhelmed by emotions that he could not handle, Daniel would eventually vanish once more, behind his defensive walls. And so it would continue, trapped in the same iterative cycle, we would live and love, feel joy and delight, whilst innocently tearing each other apart. Oftentimes, I could not

believe that from such love could be born such pain.

So, there we were again. Just before I crossed through the portal into the 16th century, I had resolved for the umpteenth time to set some distance between Daniel and myself. I made no great drama of it; rather I quietly set aside my hopes and dreams and attempted yet again to focus on learning how to live without him. Whilst a year had passed in Anne's world, when I regained consciousness in Hever Castle following the rupture of my cerebral aneurysm, it seemed that only minutes had elapsed. Yet, as Kate predicted, those minutes had in fact seemed to catalyse the realisation in Daniel that to live life without us, was no life at all. I played it down when my friend asked me about his reaction, but in fact, the man that I had fallen in love with had now returned to me and daily filled my cup to overflowing with his love, affection and attention. I felt that familiar feeling, just as when I was in Henry's arms; I was at the centre of a man's world once again, a living Goddess; a truly glorious feeling.

I hoped and prayed that the worst was behind us, and despite my illness, that a shining, bright future lay just around the corner.

I remembered all these things as Daniel held me in his arms on that sunlit afternoon, and I smiled despite my turbulent thoughts, kissing him playfully on the lips one more time as I said,

"Come on through," leading him, one hand in his and indicating with the other that we should make our way through into the kitchen. "Would you like a cup of tea?" Honestly, I didn't know why I bother asking, it is always the same; Earl Grey, a little milk and no sugar. Daniel smiled, his eyes alight with mischief and desire. Reaching up to pull down two delicate bone china mugs from a cupboard above my head, I felt Daniel come up behind me and press his body against my back, slipping his arms around my waist, pulling me gently toward him. It felt so good to be held so tenderly, with so much affection, and for the first time since

I had come round in the Long Gallery at Hever, I forgot momentarily about Henry and my overwhelming preoccupation to see him once more.

"How's...everything?" I tried to show a genuine interest in his life and family, but all too often the words stuck in my throat, as to hear him speak of his other life was tantamount to self-inflicted torture. Daniel sighed heavily and still in our embrace, he kissed me on the top of my head.

"It's okay, I guess. Everything goes on as usual but I can't stop thinking about you. While you were in hospital I thought about you *all* the time and I missed you so badly that it physically hurt." I remained silent, entreating him with my eyes to go on, for I longed to hear such sentiments. Then he continued, "Honestly, Anne, I don't know how much more of this I can take." He laughed aloud before going on, "You know someday soon you just might find me standing on your doorstep!" It was more than I could ever possibly hope for, but I just smiled as I ran my hand across the side of

his head, as if trying to clear away the confusion from his mind. I never demanded anything of Daniel. I knew that any decision he made would have to be of his own free will. I never wanted to find myself with a man who hated me for what he felt I had made him do. I could only begin to imagine with some serious trepidation the sense of trauma, loss and adjustment that would be required for Daniel to break up the family home.

I changed the subject, handing Daniel his mug of steaming tea. I needed to broach a subject which I knew would be met with some opposition. I wanted desperately to get back to Hever Castle. However, because of my surgery and inclination to fits, I couldn't drive and needed someone to take me there. Daniel travelled around the UK extensively for work and it would not be difficult for him to drop me there for the day, whilst he visited clients in Kent. I hesitated, staring down at my tea; I must have sighed heavily for Daniel interrupted my thoughts, "Is everything okay?" I

looked up a little startled.

"Yes, everything is just fine," I said. "It's just that I need to ask you a favour and I know you're not going to like it. You know that I can't drive now because of... this," I pointed toward my heavily bandaged head. "And... well... I just feel that I need to go back to Hever..." Finally, I managed to blurt it out.

"Go back to Hever! When? Are you serious? You've just got out of hospital!" Daniel was incredulous.

"I know, I know! And I know it seems a bit weird and it doesn't have to be right way. It's just that... that... It is just that what happened to me was really traumatic and I feel like I need to go back there to make peace with it all; so that I can get on with my life." Of course, this was a complete lie and I felt deeply uncomfortable about it. But I knew that I needed to be convincing for Daniel to take me there. With a

resigned sigh, he finally said,

"Okay, okay, we'll do it. But not just yet; you should get some physical rest first - get your strength together. I have a trip planned down that way in four weeks time. If you're okay then and your consultant gives you the go ahead, then I'll take you. I'll drop you off, go visit my clients and pick you up later in the afternoon." I beamed at him.

I was now embroiled in a maelstrom of emotion; emotions of sheer delight and joy of Daniel's evident commitment to our future, jostling with grief for Henry, my lost love, my family and friends, whose absence truly cut a deep and gaping wound through my heart. But then it dawned on me with awful clarity that to be with one love meant, ergo, the loss of the other; and so it was for Anne Boleyn and me, the painful waiting game, so full of uncertainty, set to continue for some time yet.

Chapter Three

London and Runneymede

July 23, 2007

The next ten days passed uneventfully. I was visited by the district nurse, who removed my stitches, although I was still a frightful sight; a deep scar across the side of my scalp made it look as though I had been attacked by a machete. Yet my hair started to grow back and I was glad to be rid of the bandages, which were distinctly uncomfortable in the sticky summer heat. In the interim, I continued to lose myself in the dusty pages of treasured books, all of which kept silent testimony to Anne's momentous life. In between my reading, I would stretch out on my comfy purple velvet sofa, listening to music from the court of Henry VIII; music that evoked powerful memories of joyous dancing juxtaposed with quiet intimate evenings dining

alone with the King. I knew many of the songs well and often closed my eyes to be transported to Windsor or Greenwich. Such halcyon days were the happiest of my life; a life which in my modern day world was blighted by so much loss and grief.

Both parents and my elder brother were killed in a car accident when I was just five years old. I was pulled from the wreckage alive, although I had no recollection of it. My kind and generous grandparents took care of me, and lavished all the love and affection that I could never receive from my own parents. Yet for all their heroic efforts, efforts for which I was deeply grateful, I always felt different to other children; I yearned for the parents and siblings that I would never have. By that summer, both my grandparents had been dead for several years. With no family to speak of, I quickly grew to cherish the loyal and loving, tight-knit Boleyn family that nurtured Anne at the centre of its world. I could even forgive them for their ruthless

ambition; a price I had been willing to pay for a sense of belonging that I had never known throughout my own childhood.

On that particular morning, I was awoken by the bleep of a text arriving on my mobile phone:

'Happy birthday! I have managed to wangle out of the meeting this afternoon. I have a treat for you. Will pick you up 1 pm.'

I smiled to myself, stretching my body languidly beneath the duvet before throwing it back, swinging my legs over the side of the bed and appraising the day ahead. It was a day which had undoubtedly just taken a turn for the better; I felt flushed with giddy excitement at the mystery that lay ahead.

At a little before one o'clock, Daniel appeared at my front door looking unbelievably handsome. Without hesitation, I put my arm about his neck, drawing him into a passionate

kiss.

"Umm, that's a nice welcome!" he said as our long and sensuous kiss ran its course and we finally broke free from each other. "If you keep on like that, we'll never get out of here!" I raised an eyebrow coquettishly, as if considering whether I should rise to the challenge. "Now, my lady I have a picnic and a bottle of *Veuve Cliquot* in the car, what pray is your pleasure?" Daniel was only playing the gentleman in addressing me as 'lady', but inadvertently he aroused now deep and primitive associations with another lifetime and a world which I still daily longed for. Rising up from this hidden place, came the name of one destination which suddenly called to me with a siren's song; an ancient place which knew me well and beckoned to me to return once more.

"Runnymede," I said resolutely. "There is a place there that I have always longed to visit," I lied of course, as I had been there as Anne on many previous occasions. However,

that would take too much explanation, so I added, "There is an ancient yew tree known as the Ankerwcyke Yew; legend says that King Henry VIII and Anne used to court there in the heady days of their romance. I think it might just be a perfect place for a picnic." I smiled mischievously. Daniel knew of my lifelong love affair with Anne Boleyn, and several times during our relationship, I had teased him about the parallels in the stories between a long dead king of England and his lady, and our own tumultuous and often bumpy romance – its great passion, and many twists and turns. I suspect he thought my obsession slightly odd, but to his credit, he always accepted me for who I was, and I was deeply grateful to him for it. However, this suggestion clearly confused him; "The Anker...what?" I laughed aloud, repeating myself for the sake of clarity.

"The Ankerwcyke Yew."

"And you say this place is near Runnymede?" He asked, still frowning at me.

"An hour's drive, just near Runnymede. Apparently, there are lots of open meadows and a ruined priory. I think it will be simply idyllic – a perfect place for a romantic picnic!" I said reaching up, clasping both my arms around the back of Daniel's neck and planting an affectionate kiss on the tip of his nose. With that kiss, we had made our plans; then, gathering up our things, we set off for a long, lazy and romantic afternoon together in Daniel's 'snow shadow grey' Aston Martin.

I was truly excited. This was no ordinary trip. From the beginning, it felt like a pilgrimage to a place that, in another lifetime, I had known so well, so intimately. It would always be a place of golden memories; a place where Henry and I had sought solitude and privacy away from the prying eyes of court; of riding on great waves of never ending affection and love which foolishly, ridiculously even, I thought would last a lifetime.

The Great Yew tree took some finding; it was tucked away down a narrow lane and across several fields; it was clearly not meant to be found by the casual, passing tourist. It seemed fitting that in order to visit the tree – a magical place which has been venerated over millennia - one should have to demonstrate a clear intention and fierce determination to find it. As we made our way across the lush green meadows that overflowed with nature's abundance, I found myself jealously guarding the secrecy of this ancient site, which once belonged to a king and his lady.

Approaching the Yew across those pretty pastures, I noticed how much woodland had been lost since I was last here with Henry; forests sadly cut away to make room for the intensive livestock farming, required to support a burgeoning population. But I recognised the wooded escarpment in front of me, which rose away sharply to the south of the Thames. The course of the river, which had changed little over time, also helped me find my bearings. Nostalgically, I saw myself

as Anne, riding along its pretty banks with the King and a small entourage, as we made our way to and from Windsor. The King had always used it to navigate the final stretch of our journey. I sensed how that quiet stretch of the river afforded a reassuring continuity, an enduring presence which extended a thread connecting me to my own evocative memories. Arm in arm, Daniel and I veered away from the river, making our way along a tree-lined avenue. Soaring silver birch provided an impressive colonnade guiding us deep into the woodland. When I was last at the Ankerwyke Yew with Henry, that beautiful tree stood proudly in the centre of the large, well-tended gardens of the magnificent priory of St. Mary. Yet, if it had not been for a silver metal plaque which announced the significance of the site, I would have missed it entirely. We stood in complete silence. The place was sadly neglected; the surrounding woodland patchy and overgrown, with a multitude of nettles and brambles covering its floor. I felt deeply saddened, as it deserved so much more love and attention than it had

evidently received for some time.

Disbelievingly, I gazed out across the meadow which lay nearby, towards the site of the original monastic buildings.; the monastery had been a thing of great beauty with its large and lofty central church, which had once dominated its surroundings and captivated me with its haunting mediaeval grandeur. I suddenly found that I could hardly breathe; for all that had remained were a few crumbling walls covered in ivy and overgrown with a profusion of wildflowers. I don't know what I had expected. I knew that like virtually every religious house in England, the Priory had been crushed by Henry not so long after Anne and her faction had been similarly destroyed. Yet, nevertheless, I felt bereaved.

I turned to look at the tree which was considerably shorter than I remembered. I had been prepared though; we learnt from a local landowner at the outset of our walk that the upper part of the tree had snapped off some twenty

years earlier - that it used to be - as I remembered it, nearly a hundred feet high. What remained of the upper part lay like a slumbering giant next to its stalwart companion. I found myself to be full of emotion, as I made my way along the short, side path that led me from the main track to the base of the tree. As soon as I was beneath its gnarled and tangled canopy, I threw myself against the trunk, as if I were greeting a long lost friend, pressing my cheek against its flaky, rough bark as I had done so many times before as Mistress Anne. It was as if the spirit of that tree was speaking to me, whispering my name, and for a moment, I was at one once more with the magical genius of this place. My memories, my longing, my love and my pain had overwhelmed me; the pain at my own loss and that of the sad, crumbling decay of the priory, the woodland and the loneliness of this Great Yew, all had caused me to well up. For the first time since regaining consciousness in my modern day life, a tsunami of emotion had suddenly burst forth in a torrent of silent tears which streamed down my

cheeks.

Daniel followed me into the clearing underneath the canopy. He put down the picnic basket and rug that he had been carrying and I felt his reassuring hand upon my shoulders. He placed his arms around me, holding me whilst my quiet tears turned into great, deep, racking sobs. Of course, Daniel had no idea about the real cause my distress. Instead, he took it to be a natural reaction to the illness and held me tenderly against his chest, stroking my head with one hand, whilst he whispered soothingly,

"It's okay, it's okay. Everything is going to be fine." Suddenly all my grief and frustration for the life I had lost with Henry, and the life I seemed as yet incapable of creating with Daniel, exploded forth in a barrage of suppressed emotion.

"You don't understand! I don't care what happens to me!" I exclaimed as I broke free from his embrace, my arms

extended out in exasperation. I couldn't hold back the truth for one more moment; and against my better judgement I said: "You have no idea what actually happened to me!" Daniel stood motionless, looking deeply perplexed as I forged on, "When I passed out in the Long Gallery at Hever I..." I hesitated but I knew that this story needed to be told.

"...well, something unbelievable happened to me and I just simply can't explain it. When I blacked out, I left this world and I woke up in Hever, I was... Anne Boleyn." For a moment the fight had gone out of me, my arms dropped to my sides. I knew that it sounded too fantastical for anybody to believe – in some ways, I could hardly believe it myself.

"I know you will never be able to believe me; that you will say it was just a flight of fancy of a fevered and sick brain, but I tell you I was there! I was there for a whole year... I saw Henry and he loved me and my friends; Nan and Margery, my brother George and my parents, Thomas and Elizabeth Boleyn; I saw them all!"

I looked up at Daniel who had been listening patiently. I must have looked pathetic, but I was so far into the story that I felt an overwhelming urge to complete it. "I miss them, Daniel. I miss them all so much. I am so confused; for in that life, I loved Henry with all my heart." I looked up at Daniel again, walking forward until we stood within a foot of each other. I spoke earnestly. "Yet here I am, with you, and I love you with all my heart." I looked away and contemplated again what had troubled me so deeply since I had arrived back in my modern day life. "Tell me; is it possible to love two people so entirely at the same time?"

Daniel remained entirely silent, giving me the space to finish what I had started. So, I began pacing up and down beneath that ancient yew tree, my hands on my hips, as I had done so many times as Mistress Anne. "But look! Here we are Daniel; you tell me you love me and yet nothing changes. I will never ask you to leave your wife but I simply don't see us making any progress whatsoever! We are together – and

yet we are not – and it's killing both of us. You say you've made your choice that you can't leave yet, not until Jemima is more independent. But you are kidding yourself, Daniel. You haven't made your choice; you are in no man's land and it's tearing you apart, let alone what it is doing to me. I can't keep doing this Daniel! I can't keep going round in circles..." Suddenly, the fury had gone out of me and I sank down in resignation upon the tree trunk, which had long ago fallen to the forest floor. I couldn't look at him, for I felt too wretched; in that moment, I wished only to be alone.

"Sweetheart." I snapped my head around to look at Daniel who sat himself down beside me, his arm reaching round my shoulders as he brought his in face close into mine. For a moment, I could not believe my ears; he had never used such a word with me. I had no idea where it came from; but for a second, he sounded so like Henry. My lover lifted his hand gently and raised my chin so that my lips met his in a fragile kiss. I closed my eyes and when we finally parted, I found

Daniel gazing at me intently for what seemed like the longest time. I could not have guessed what Daniel would say about either my incredible tale of adventure, or my tirade about our never-ending story; but what he said next, was entirely unexpected, shocking and yet deeply moving, "You know that whenever I look at you, all I see is Anne Boleyn, don't you. You have her spirit, of that I am sure." Somehow it was the most accepting thing that Daniel could have said to me in that moment.

At the very core of my being, I felt entirely validated, even though in truth I did not know where it came from, and he would never say it again. There was always a deep, immortal, soulful connection between us that seemed to endure no matter what the vicissitudes of fate threw our way. I recognised fully in that moment, that like this ancient tree, Daniel and I were old souls whose paths had always crossed and perhaps always would. Suddenly, my egotistical tirade seemed small and insubstantial in the face

of the vast expanse of eternity. And so, in the end, we sat there and drank champagne; we toasted our past, our present and future. The Ankerwycye Yew, which had stood as a silent witness to Henry and Anne's historic love, bore witness to ours, and I wondered if this would be the final time, or were we bound to return here yet again, in yet another lifetime, as yet beyond our knowing.

Chapter Four

Hever Castle

August 10, 2007

I was returning home to Hever and was virtually beside myself with excitement. Just over two weeks had gone by since Daniel and I spent a lazy afternoon picnicking on the riverbank in the meadows near Runnymede. We sat in the shade of an old English oak and after my initial, emotional outburst, I recounted to Daniel all my recollections of my time spent as Anne. It was such a relief to finally be able to tell somebody else about the secrets that I harboured close to my breast since I regained consciousness at Hever. To my surprise, Daniel seemed genuinely interested in my experiences, and I was oh so thankful that he did not condemn me, or try to persuade me to seek psychiatric help. To this day I don't know what he truly thought about my tales of another world; I always loved Daniel for his

open- mindedness and his disinterest in judging others and that day, I was just grateful for his ability to be receptive to the great mysteries of life, mysteries that sometimes defy our understanding. However, after that afternoon, he never questioned me about it again, and I had no further inclination to speak more of it. Yet, it propelled us to an even more astonishing level of intimacy.

Following our trip to Runneymede, I continued to gain in strength, walking out more and more to drink from nature's never ending power to replenish the soul. I was due to see my neurosurgeon a few days before I travelled down to Kent with Daniel. He was utterly delighted with my progress and encouraged me to continue to get back to normality. I nearly laughed out loud at that suggestion, for I no longer knew what that meant. However, Mr Harris's words of reassurance were enough to secure me my day out to Hever Castle.

When we set out on that pleasant morning in August, my

relationship with Daniel had never been more beautiful, more intimate, or more promising. I was sure that the tide had begun to turn, even if just by degree, and oh, how much I wanted that tide to turn, to finally taste the possibility that Daniel and I would at last be able to contemplate beginning our life together.

When he dropped me off at the entrance to the castle, I kissed my lover and friend lightly on the lips, saying goodbye and sealing an agreement that he would pick me up in the same spot, three hours hence. If I'd had my way, I would surely have stayed all day, luxuriating in the feeling of being once more within the arms of my ghostly family. However, it was just six weeks since the rupture of my aneurysm, and although I was feeling so much stronger, I still tired easily. Thus, I agreed somewhat reluctantly to Daniel's terms, thankful at least to have the opportunity to be close once more to the place which was as much my home as anywhere in this world.

I paid for my ticket and walked down the sweeping drive, the Boleyn family home revealing itself to me gradually from between the leafy foliage which adorned the surrounding parkland and which ran along each side of the driveway. I descended the winding path that had once actually headed northwards, parallel to the castle and sweeping through the heart of the mediaeval village of Hever, an integral part of the castle's community. Yet the settlement had long since been displaced by Lord Astor in his quest for total privacy, leaving instead the paved driveway to lead me eastward, into the heart of the Eden Valley and towards the gatehouse and main entrance to the building.

It was the perfect late summer's day; the morning already melting beneath a pristine, flawless sky. The gentlest of breezes touched my skin, keeping the heavy heat of the approaching midday sun at bay; whilst circling languidly above my head, climbing skyward upon hot thermals, the

screech of a hawk reminded me of the day when Henry and I picnicked at Windsor Lodge; when the King first declared his love for Anne Boleyn. As I looked around, I noted that the profusion of colour associated with midsummer had long since returned to the earth, but the vibrancy of green, manicured lawns set against the azure sky and the mellow sandstone of the castle's ivy clad walls, remained truly enchanting. I paused for a moment, as I beheld the most welcome sight; there she was, waiting for me patiently, as she had done for nearly five hundred years.

It was the place that nurtured me as I took my first tentative steps in a world that had only previously lived in my fertile imagination. I had known some of the happiest times of my life there and closing my eyes, I imagined the castle just as I had last seen it. Of course, I was half delirious with the sweat when I returned home with my parents from Greenwich, but I could never forget the sight of my beloved Hever. There it was, in the theatre of my imagination; the small settlement

of several, rather modest wattle and daub houses which formed the village of Hever to my left; then straight in front of me, directly in front of the castle itself, a large area of swampland which originally protected the south facing gatehouse from attack. When I opened my eyes, the rugged beauty had gone; in its place, a far prettier, more manicured version; the marsh long ago drained, replaced by lawns, topiaried hedging, and a second, perfectly formed moat, which was crossed by a bridge leading towards higher ground to the south.

Of course, I was not alone when I visited the castle that day. It may have been midweek, but it was also mid August and at the height of the summer vacation period. Schools were on holiday and great swathes of families and foreign visitor's flocked to enjoy this most wonderful piece of English history. I crossed the castle drawbridge, weaving my way between boisterous children and frazzled parents. Like Anne, I was an intuitive soul, who drew

much from the energy that vibrated from people and the walls of any building. However, I felt myself begin to panic. The great cacophony of noise, of people jostling to see all the great treasures of the castle, at first made it difficult for me to tune in to the more subtle energies that whispered my name.

So yes, I was assaulted by the images of Henry arriving at Hever on that very first day; instead of the busy crowd, I saw only the vivid colours of heraldry, heard the sound of horses' hooves upon the cobblestones, the clinking of stirrups, the chatter and laughter of men who accompanied the King on his journey. But, it was only my memory that painted these pictures; pictures that were as wispy and ghostlike as the people who had long since passed over to a different world. I felt the impregnable barrier that I usually sensed separating that life and this one, and I was immediately sure, that whatever had paved the way for me to travel across time before, would not be found at Hever that day. I

suspect, that in the deepest recesses of my heart, I was disappointed but I was stoically determined to enjoy whatever the castle could offer me by way of quiet comfort.

With Hever so busy, I had to queue patiently around the edge of the courtyard before I could enter through what was still the main entrance of the family home. As I finally stepped into the cool interior, I was flooded with the most glorious feeling of finally being home and I could have cried with joy. I was surrounded by people shuffling their way through the Entrance Hall towards the rooms in the west of the castle; as I closed my eyes, I almost expected to be met by pretty Bess, bobbing a curtsy, ready to take my riding gloves from me and tell me the whereabouts of my mother, busy in her duties as chatelaine. Somehow, I did manage to get beyond the crowded hubbub of the present and feel the old energy of the Boleyns – my very own family – touching my heart and whispering their words of welcome in my ear.

As on my fateful visit to Hever just six weeks earlier, I had

followed the crowd into the modern day Inner Hall. Of course, I saw what so many others did not; how the castle had been remodelled by the Astors and just how different it was to the home that I so recently called my own; I was not ungrateful, for the family had rescued Hever from decay. However, I was not misled by the very elaborate hallway, which I once thought original to the house. In Anne's time, it served as the castle's kitchen and it amused me that it was now so elegantly adorned, displaying some of the castle's most valuable paintings. This time, I found myself first in front of the portrait of my sister, Mary. I think that I stood there for the longest time, through her frozen enigmatic smile, a montage of images, of her smiling face and carefree laughter, ignited my mind and filled me with a yearning to see her again. Quite without thinking, I did what I had done a hundred times or more in Anne's shoes; I simply reached out the index finger of my hand to touch her face, as if I might feel the very warmth of her skin. Suddenly a voice piped up,

“Excuse me Madame, please do not touch the paintings!” I spun about to see a guide shaking her finger and frowning with disapproval in my direction. I quickly came back to my senses and shrugged my shoulders, apologising silently as I mouthed,

“Sorry!” through the crowd - several of whom turned to look in my direction, some no doubt ‘tut-tutting’ at my transgression. I found it ironic that they guarded the castle from the one woman who had undoubtedly put Hever on the map. I wondered what they would say to me if they only knew the truth, knew just what secrets I held close to my breast. I walked over to the far side of the fireplace to where Anne's picture was hung, positioned so that it allowed her to gaze toward her sister for eternity. Suddenly, though my line of sight was caught by the life-size picture of Henry, hung upon the far wall.

The portrait was of someone visibly older and more obese

than the Henry I had known. Of course, I had seen this famous image painted in 1542 many times; Henry stood squarely on, supported by his bejewelled staff and almost defying the onlooker to meet his eyes. Yet, somehow on that day, for the first time, I could see into the painting and to the man I had come to know so well. I felt the pain in Henry's bloated, diseased body and knew how deeply it had sickened his mind. But what most struck me is how little light there was in his eyes. There was so much anger there it almost made me want to turn away. I knew in that moment that Henry had seen too much of the darkness in men's hearts, including his own, and it had poisoned him to the core, eroding his vitality by degree; so, that by the time this picture had been painted, he was surely and gradually letting go of life.

It had saddened me, and after a time, I had torn myself away to continue my gentle exploration of the other rooms of the house, lingering in those chambers which

we had used most as a family; I rested silently, tucked away by a side wall in the Great Hall, for maybe ten minutes or more, trying to recapture the night that I danced in Henry's arms for the first time, replaying every detail over and over in my mind. Yet no ghostly voices called to me as I mounted the stone vice-staircase which led up to the first floor, nor did I smell the tantalising scent of rosewater perfume that had been Anne's own. Yet, when I emerged into the room which had once formed the lion's share of the solar – the main, first-floor family room – I stopped. In the 21st century it was aptly named, 'The Book of Hours' room. But, I was not drawn by the object which had given the room its name. Instead, I was frozen to the spot as I saw my mother, Elizabeth Boleyn, sitting in front of the lighted fire, working her embroidery diligently, as I had seen her do so many times before.

"Please look up..." I whispered, for I longed to see her face again. Of course, it was all in my imagination, and so

Elizabeth did as I commanded and lifted her face. Smiling she said,

“Come child, sit with me and talk awhile.” It was as we had done on many evenings during my self-imposed exile to Hever; times that I now treasure as the picture of a happy innocence before I - and Anne - were dragged into all that was black in the world, before the earth had opened up beneath my feet and swallowed me whole. I must have smiled back at her apparition, a gesture misunderstood by a guide standing beyond, close to the window, for she greeted me warmly,

“Good morning.”

“Oh, good morning!” I said as I smiled in return before moving awkwardly on, drawn this time by a book displayed in a glass case over to my left. Thankfully, a large group of tourists had just left the room. It was perfect for my reunion with an object which nearly five hundred years earlier had

been so dearly treasured. I wasn't surprised that it was there – I knew of its existence and that it was a prized possession of the castle, and unlike the painting downstairs, this time I was allowed to touch the glass casing that protected Anne's fragile Book of Hours.

It was open at the page where I once scrawled across with the most poignant of words; '*Le Temps Viendra, Je Anne Boleyn*'. I did not know that day in the castle's 16th century library why I was suddenly moved to write those words, but it was Anne who had guided my hand to write the message that would speak to me alone. The time had indeed come for me to see this book again and I suddenly realised that I had written those words as proof to myself that I had indeed been Anne Boleyn in another lifetime. I ran my hand across the smooth, cold glass, imagining that I was again able to turn its illuminated vellum pages. It is funny how sometimes an object speaks to you of its owner; and as I stood there before that little book; one which I had read diligently, nearly every day as Anne, I felt her energy singing sweetly from its

pages, filling me with the most exquisite memories of sunny hours cosseted in my father's library, hidden away from the intrigues of court. I longed to hold it again but of course, it would have been a fool's errand to even try and explain why I should be allowed. How frustrating it had been back then to know what I knew and yet, never be able to disclose my secrets to the world. They will indeed be secrets that I, as Anne, will take to the shallow grave that shortly awaits me on the far side of the Tower precinct.

However, on that day, I was all too aware of more people beginning to fill the room behind me, and so, I reluctantly moved on as I finally felt ready to say goodbye, for the time being, to the chamber in which my mother and I had spent so much of our time together at Hever. Yet, one more surprise lay in store for me. As I was making my way toward the exit, I noticed an enormous tapestry covering the entire left hand wall, and in the centre was a woman, who I felt was vaguely familiar to me. In Anne's world, I had seen many portraits of her although, due to her pride and distain

for Anne, we sadly never met in person – it was Mary Tudor, Henry's younger, and much beloved, sister. It was immediately apparent that the tapestry depicted the marriage of the Princess to Louis XII of France in 1514. It was a powerful dynastic image, and the two central figures of Louis and Mary, who were exchanging rings, commanded the scene and drew one's eye away from those courtiers surrounding the royal couple. Yet, I looked right past them to the figure of a woman, set back in the upper right hand corner; it was a figure which left me transfixed. With growing excitement, I stepped back to get a better perspective on the picture portrayed.

Yes, it was, I was sure of it; there fifth along from the right hand side was the figure of Anne. She was unmistakable to me; I looked at her face in the mirror so many times before! I almost laughed out loud, for whilst no known contemporary portrait of Anne existed in the 21st century, there she was, a dark-haired, young woman in her first flush of youth.

She was clearly leaning forward and gesturing with her left hand, all the time effortlessly holding the attention of two richly attired men, who were no doubt part of the English delegation in France. The image was full of vibrancy and movement – just like the woman I had come to know. In adjusting myself to get the best view of the tapestry, I found myself once again close to the guide who had greeted me with a warm smile, when I first entered the chamber. Lost in my own thoughts, I was slightly taken aback when she spoke to me once again, this time, clearly reading my mind.

“It is such a romantic tapestry don't you think?” Her name badge identified her as ‘Chloe’ who smiled at me as she spoke. I was amused that whilst historians cast about, here and there, looking for the face of this most enigmatic of Queens in contemporary 16th century portraiture, she had all the time been smiling down upon us from this magnificent tapestry hung within her own home. I looked back at the arras, cocking my head, as I replied,

"It is indeed a beautiful piece of art but tell me," I could not resist but tease her good-naturedly, "Do you not think that Anne herself must be in the portrait?" I watched the eyebrows of my guide rise, as she nodded her head thoughtfully and replied,

"Such things have indeed been postulated but unfortunately, we simply do not know." I know it was wicked of me to say what I said next, but I simply could not depart from the castle that day without leaving behind a clue to the life that I had known. So, I broke into the broadest of smiles declaring,

"I think you will find that if you look carefully, you'll see that she is there, telling you in every which way that she can, even in her gesture that, 'Here I am, Anne Boleyn'." I did not wait to hear the guide's reply; just watched her face crumple into delicate confusion as I turned to walk away, casting only the most enigmatic of smiles over my shoulder, as I finally left the room, and Chloe, behind.

Time slipped through my fingers quickly enough, and before long, I emerged back into the intimate confines of the castle's courtyard at the foot of its 13th century gatehouse. I had spent some time in the Long Gallery, hovering as close as I was able to the recessed bay window at its far end, the place where I had first found myself transported into my heroine's body. The alcove was roped off and the busyness of the chamber precluded me from seating myself in exactly the same spot where I had first lost consciousness. Yet I knew that it did not matter; for I felt well and strong and that if, by some uncanny miracle, I was in fact to find myself in the 16th century again, it would not be from this place.

Thus, I was content to make my way back across the drawbridge, spending some time in the rose garden which had been much remodelled, but was just as beautiful as when I had last seen it. I didn't care for the distant gardens reclaimed by the Astors, for they had nothing to do with Anne. Instead, I ate a packed lunch that I brought with me in

a small rucksack on the lawns overlooking the castle, before finally making my way slowly back uphill toward the modern day village of Hever. Glancing at my watch, I knew that I had perhaps half an hour before Daniel returned to collect me. There was just one more place which called out to me and which I knew I must visit before the day was through.

St Peter's Church lay to the south-west of the castle, just outside its modern day perimeter. Founded upon an original Norman church, the late 14th century building was one which, as Mistress Anne, I knew intimately. Perhaps because of the castle's modest size, there had been no family chapel within its walls, and thus I often rode out a quarter of a mile to the parish church of St Peter to worship with other members of my family. As I approached it on that fine summer's afternoon, I admired its modest simplicity and the beauty of the local sandstone, gleaming in the brilliant sunshine. Like most English Parish churches, St Peter's stood

serenely as a peaceful, silent witness to centuries of English history. And whilst the pretty churchyard was perhaps more manicured than I had last seen it, bedecked with foliage

of rhododendron bushes and ancient yew trees, the building itself was virtually exactly as I remembered, including the dominant west tower and its fine, slender spire that pointed towards the heavens.

I made my way along, through the graveyard and down the path that led to the main south entrance of the church. I finally felt at peace with the world and all that surrounded me; indeed, my heart was gladdened by a delightful aria of birdsong which filled that peaceful enclave with vibrant, joyful life. It was mid-afternoon by the time I stepped inside St Peter's. Turning a heavy iron handle that felt cool and hard within my hand, I unhooked the latch of the great oak door which guarded its entrance; with one push it had swung inwards with a great, loud creak. It was a relief to step inside of that ancient cradle of worship, kept cool from the

sultry afternoon sun by thick, sandstone walls which had long ago been raised up to the glory of God. Closing the door gently behind me, I was relieved to find that at last, away from the tourists, I was alone. The flagstone floor which had been so pristine when I came here as Anne, had been gradually worn away by centuries of devoted pilgrims and visitors, who came to commune with their God, or to simply enjoy the divine serenity of the church.

Yet I had not gone there that day to pray or to pass the time with idle curiosity. Instead, I was drawn deep into the heart of the church, toward the Bullen Chapel, which was founded by Anne's great-grandfather, Sir Geoffrey Boleyn in the mid-15th century. For here, I knew that I could finally spend time with the man who had once been my father and who, on 12th March, 1538, was finally laid to rest in to a fine, Purbeck marble tomb in a ceremony befitting his status as Earl of Wiltshire and Ormonde.

Whatever history made Thomas Boleyn, for a time, he had

been my father, and although he was no saint, I loved him nevertheless. Suddenly, standing in front of the well-worn vault, I felt saddened that I had no flowers to lay there, nothing to mark my love or remembrance for the man I had come to know so well. Lost in thoughts of the many conversations we had shared, the ups and downs of our sometimes tempestuous relationship, I imagined my father's body decayed beneath the hand which I ran lovingly across the top of the rough stone slab which sealed his grave. Upon this slab, a fine brass etching of Sir Thomas's figure showed him in robes of a Garter Knight, whilst the falcon, the crest of the Boleyn family, took flight above his right shoulder. I walked around to the top of the tomb to read my father's epitaph and in the most reverent of whispers I read it aloud, cutting through the empty silence of the church,

“Here lieth Sr. Thomas Bvllen; Knight of the Order of the Garter; Erle of Wilscher and Erle of Ormvnde; wiche

deceased the 12 dai of Marche in the yere of ovr Lorde, 1538."

I knew that after the death of Anne and George, Thomas Boleyn had continued to serve at court, although stripped of some of his titles and his close association with the King. He seemed to have soldiered on, but I knew that he must have been a broken man, and I feared terribly for the great heartbreak that it must have caused within my parent's marriage. He was an old man of sixty-one when he died. No matter what had happened between him and his youngest daughter, I felt saddened for the grief that he must surely have known at the end of his life. Weighed down heavily by these thoughts, I reached out with both my hands, stretching forward until I was bent over the length of the tomb, finally coming to rest my cheek upon my father's image, as I whispered, "I'm so sorry, so terribly, terribly sorry that it all had to end that way. If in any way, I did anything to cause you sorrow or suffering, please father, forgive me." Oh, it was not that I was blaming myself for

everything that had happened to the Boleyns, but nor was I – or Anne –an entirely innocent bystander; thus, for my misdeeds and negligence, I truly longed for forgiveness and salvation. I think I must have stayed there for the longest time, until a click at the door lifted me from my reverie. A young couple entered the church, no doubt to see this most famous of monuments. I quickly brushed myself down and checked my watch; Daniel would be here at any moment. Gathering my bag, I fleetingly touched my lips with my fingers, placing upon them a kiss which I transferred to my father's brass plaque in a final act of love.

When I left Hever that day, I thought I would return again, many times over. As we drove away in Daniel's Aston Martin, I cast a final glance over my shoulder to see the spire of St Peter's receding into the distance, I could never have known then that I would never see my beloved Hever again.

Chapter Five

Greenwich and

The British Library, London

April 21, 2009

In the end, nothing turned out entirely as I had expected. As the weeks rolled steadily by, and I watched the seasons come and go, the stalemate in my relationship with Daniel stubbornly endured with little change – despite my earlier, fledgling hope for a new beginning. Like Anne, I had become the undisputed mistress of perseverance. At the time, I beheld my tenacity as a virtue which set me apart from those who fell by the wayside under similar circumstances. In my conceit, it spoke only of my inner strength - of which I had become inordinately proud; my ability to bear the intransigence of my trial with resilience and equanimity - at least on the surface. The fact of the

matter is that for the longest time, I deluded myself about the unending pain that the situation inflicted on me. It is only now that I truly see the wasted years and the full scale of my self-deception; I see in my arrogance that I deserved better, my futile determination to bend circumstance to fit my will, and my utter foolishness to think that the ending would be any different than it was always going to be. I ask for nobody's pity; for as the Good Lord has said, as you sow, so shall you reap. And it is not that I meant to hurt anyone; but somehow I became lost, confused in my own ignorance of the powerful karmic forces that were at play behind the scenery of my life; forces which at the time, I could not see and did not understand.

Thus, a full twenty months slipped by since my visit to Hever. Physically, I was incredibly fortunate to regain much of my strength. Apparently I had been lucky. It was only much later when I realised just how fortunate I was, being in the fifty percent of the population who suffered the same condition, and yet who went on to live for more than a

year. However, because I experienced some minor swelling at the base of my brain, I had to take medication to prevent epileptic seizures which I was warned could follow. Thankfully, none had, so statistically I appeared to move out of the danger zone, and stopped the medication. Mr Harris' optimism for a healthy future blossomed. Yet, I still carried within my skull a ticking time-bomb, and I suppose, I just had to live with the uncertainty over if, or when, it might detonate. In hindsight, I coped through indefatigable optimism, always seeing myself as one of the lucky ones, dodging the spectre of death at every turn.

With my health improving, I had to eventually return to work, part-time. Psychologically, I suspect of all things, work encouraged me to live my life again. After my visit to Hever, several months ago, I continued to dwell upon the time that I had walked in the footsteps of Anne Boleyn. Faces from a lost world were ever-present, filling my dreams and preoccupying my waking hours. But I knew that apart

from my initial confession to Daniel, I could not share my experiences with anyone; no single living soul would ever understand what had occurred to me. And over the months, these deep wounds too gradually healed, for as they say, time is the most benevolent of healers, and evermore I had continued to make peace with my loss.

At the same time, I made a conscious choice to keep away from places that I associated with Anne; I never confronted myself directly with the truth behind my avoidance, which was that I was afraid that to do so would stir up the pain of losing her, and those dear to me, all over again. Instead, I concentrated on my work, which kept me inordinately busy and therefore at a distance from my Tudor past. I now think that my visit to Hever in those early days was mainly to test my sanity; to know that I had not just made it all up; and of course, I had secretly yearned to be sucked back in time once more. But in the end, the visit signified the beginning of my return to the 21st century

and the singular acceptance that I would never return to Henry or my Tudor family.

While Lady Luck happily smiled down on my physical good fortune, I can't say the same about my relationship with Daniel. For several weeks after my discharge from hospital, he was attentive to my every need and full of physical affection. Our love was sweet and tender; and as I had done with Henry so many times in the past, I often found myself looking into his eyes and seeing them alight with longing. I assumed that his longing was for us to be together openly; to do the things that normal people in love would do. And for a while, I thought my wishes would be fulfilled, as we talked of the home that we would set up together, of the bliss that we would create forging something beautiful out of the ashes of a situation that neither of us was particularly proud.

And so the months rolled on; reunited shortly after

Christmas of the same year, we fell into each other's arms, yearning to see each other again after a festive season spent apart; each of us alone and isolated in our own way; I had no family to retreat to, and Daniel remained bound up in a loveless marriage. For the briefest moment, we teetered on the edge of him finally finding the courage to end it with his wife, and to sort out the mess in which we were mired. Yet the winds of change were to turn again, blowing cruelly from a different direction that would drive yet another invisible wedge between us.

Just a few weeks later, in the early days of 2008, Daniel's daughter suddenly fell ill with meningitis. He and Rose were lucky to recognise her symptoms early and rushed her to hospital immediately, which had no doubt saved her life. She was severely unwell for several days, drifting in and out of consciousness. Finally, she turned the corner, her small body determined to claw its way back to life. I prayed for her recovery, because if Daniel were to lose

Jemima, it would have utterly destroyed him. Thus, I was indeed grateful that my prayers had been answered, while watching helplessly as my own dreams slipped away once more.

Seeing himself so close to losing his daughter forever, something had shifted in the man I loved during that Spring. He later confessed his deep sense of guilt; his feeling that he was being punished for our love through his daughter's illness. The rebound effect was immediate, causing Daniel to retreat and shutting himself away even more deeply into a world that was entirely inaccessible to me. All too soon, I became the outsider again. That unbreakable bond between parent and child was ever the thorn in my side, and oh, how I empathised with Anne! I understood her frustration at wanting to be part of something that eluded her. I imagined that she felt the same as I did; watching father and daughter seal themselves in a select clique whose membership was jealously guarded;

with a nagging feeling that one needed a secret password to gain entry, that somehow you were never good enough to be let into the inner sanctum. I saw how Anne had fought to be part of that inner sanctum in her own way, and I understood only too painfully that she would never truly triumph over Henry's love for his daughter, Mary, in spite of all his grand gestures and declarations of his undying love for his lady. So, once more I watched Daniel melt into the shadows, becoming evermore unavailable, and his heart evermore defended against the poignancy of our love.

By the beginning of 2009, I was exhausted by the interminable revolving door in which I had been trapped for nearly seven years and I think it is true to say that the spell which bound me to Daniel was finally beginning to break. It was not a conscious act of will, but rather as a result of psychological fatigue and gradual erosion of the trust and respect that I felt for him. But as I was soon to find out, the gods had not yet finished toying with me. I had not

yet broken free enough to completely walk away and find refuge far from the stormy events which were yet again gathering on the far horizon.



April 21, 2009 was no ordinary day. I had made plans; the twenty month long stalemate with my emotions was finally coming to an end. Standing looking out of my kitchen window into my rather compact and bijoux garden that was so typical of London, I watched giant white clouds race across a blue sky, whilst long-stemmed daffodils nodded their heads in appreciation of the fine day - and my equally fine mood. I wrapped my soft, grey cashmere jumper tightly around my body, folding one arm across my chest, whilst in the other hand, I clasped a steaming mug of my favourite lemon and ginger tea, sweetened with a little honey. It was Tuesday and I had the whole week off work. With a frisson of excitement, I looked forward to the week which stretched ahead. Daniel was away with his family,

and with no one else to please but myself, I felt ready to re-engage with my lifelong passion for Tudor history; a passion that I had largely turned my back on since the rupture of my aneurysm, nearly a full year and a half earlier.

England was once again celebrating one of the most famous monarchs of English history; it was five hundred years since Henry was proclaimed **Henry the Eighth, by the Grace of God, King of England, France and Lord of Ireland** in London, following the death of his father Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor dynasty. A whole raft of exhibitions, talks and celebrations were planned over the summer that year, and at last I felt ready to revisit my Tudor past. Quite coincidentally, I saw a poster on the London underground advertising a special exhibition due to be launched at the British Library entitled, ‘Henry VIII: Man and Monarch’ to commemorate the young King's accession to the English throne. When I saw it, I remember

how my heart skipped a beat; those piercing blue eyes of Henry's stared out from Holbein's famous image; and whilst the image portrayed on that poster was a little older than the man I had known and loved, those eyes once more held me spellbound. So many memories tumbled forth, one after the other, through my mind, which took me quite by surprise as I realised how efficiently I had kept them tucked away in a place that was inaccessible to my casual, daily mind. They were memories of the happiest times, and I smiled, thankful that I felt little trace no regret or remorse.

I didn't know what would be on show at the exhibition, but I knew that there would be objects which I had already seen and probably touched with my very own hands, perhaps even objects that I once called my own. I found myself longing to see them again, a longing touched only by sweet anticipation. I was determined to make it a day of celebration for the woman who I loved, and still held so close to my heart, and of the man she had so utterly

beguiled.

Therefore, on that morning, I planned to walk from my flat, up through Greenwich Park to enjoy the view from the Observatory over the place where Henry's great palace had once stood, perched as a jewel on the banks of the Thames, before treating myself to a river trip from Greenwich Pier toward Westminster, there to alight and take the Tube northwards towards my final destination. It was not the easiest or the quickest way to get to the British Library, but I wanted once more to enjoy the journey that I had taken on so many occasions at Henry's side, in a flotilla of barges heading upstream as the royal court had moved from Greenwich toward Whitehall, Richmond and Windsor.

By nine o'clock, I was ready to leave the house. Pausing in the hallway, I picked up a warm jacket to wear over my bootleg jeans and slipped my hands into a light pair of grey leather gloves and a soft, grey, woollen scarf; I knew that

there would be a cool breeze upon the river that morning, and that I would no doubt be grateful for the extra warmth. For a brief moment, I caught sight of my face in the mirror. By then, my hair had fully grown back, hiding the scar on my scalp; that morning I swept it up into a loose chignon at the nape of my neck, in order to tame it from the blustery wind. I could not help but notice that whilst I looked well, the last few years had seen my eyes take on the appearance of one who had seen more of life than perhaps she might have liked. I often saw it in my reflection around that time, a certain wisdom mixed with tiredness and a subtle undertone of haunted sadness. Nevertheless, I smiled at myself with compassion, brushing away any sense of melancholia and instead picking up my bag and mobile phone, which lay nearby on the hall side table. I briefly checked for any messages; there were none. I was glad of it, for it set my mind at rest and allowed me to relax and delight in the remainder of my day.

In Anne's time, Greenwich was a delightful little village, lying outside the palace precinct. My dear friend, Sir Henry Norris and later, the likes of Thomas Tallis, would have lodgings there. It was a thriving little community which served the palace faithfully in its time. Back then, the village was surrounded by idyllic countryside, set back a good distance from the main city of London, on the south bank of the Thames. Over the centuries, Greenwich had been engulfed by the urban sprawl of London's suburbs. However, it managed to retain a sense of character and unique identity. Of course, it was far busier than the Greenwich I once knew, but its 21st century persona had come to possess a vibrant array of boutique style shops, cafes and restaurants that attracted both well-to-do and bohemian residents, as well as great swathes of tourists who came to see the Old Naval College, the Cutty Sark, as well as those who wanted to simply enjoy the delights of Greenwich Park.

Sadly, the sprawling forest surrounding Greenwich Park had long since fallen victim to town planners. It often made me regretful to think that such great beauty had been so irrevocably lost, but I was eternally grateful that at least part of the park, in which Henry and I had spent so many happy hours hunting and hawking, had survived the passage of time. On a weekend in summer, it was a place that was packed with tourists and local residents; some out walking, others playing football, whilst dogs chased round, one after the other, barking their happy delight. Many other folk just lay in the sun, sunbathing alone or chatting with friends, content to while away the hours in one of the great open, green spaces of London. However, the day I visited, it was very different. It was midweek on a cool, windy, April morning; so, by and large, those people passing through the park were busy going to work, or taking their morning exercise. Just occasionally an enthusiastic tourist, determined to beat the crowds, could be found making their way uphill toward Greenwich Observatory, the home of

Greenwich Meantime.

This too was my destination and I was glad that I had worn my warmest jacket, for the wind whipped around me in all directions with a fierce chill, despite the dry, brightness of the day. I watched other people as they passed by me, heading downhill toward the village of Greenwich from whence I had just come; the wind tugged playfully at people's coats and scarves; one man even losing his hat which was tossed carelessly aside upon the invisible breeze, the wind seeming to delight in its game as he chased the errant cap across the grass before finally pinning it down, brushing it off and fixing it firmly back upon his head. The path that morning took me diagonally across the parkland before climbing steeply up several flights of steps to reach the summit of the hill, which overlooked the old Royal Naval College. Once upon a time, I rode my horse out to this place, my brother at my side. Back then, Duke Humphrey's Tower had been our backdrop, but this

had long ago been replaced by the Observatory. I sought out the exact spot where we rested, side by side, and spoke about George's marital trials with his wife, Jane. I found myself giggling involuntarily, closing my eyes and remembering well our laughter, and how I nearly fell off my horse in the process of our playful exchange. As my laughter died away, I opened my eyes to see the great palace of Greenwich below me. There she was in my mind's eye, a great sprawl of elegant Tudor architecture; the pitched roofs of the Queen's apartments, the Disguising and Banqueting Houses in which I had danced so often, the many tall chimneys spiralling heavenwards in delicate barley twists, the two, twin, fairytale towers that overlooked the tiltyard on the eastern side of the palace precinct, and finally, Henry's great donjon encompassing his most secret of chambers. How beautiful the gardens had looked, perfectly symmetrical and overflowing with sweet flower blossom! For a moment, it was as if I had pulled back the veil on a lost world, and watched my friends and I riding out

from the southern gateway of the Palace, or shooting at the butts in the garden – just as I did on that fateful day when Nan had come crying to me that Wolsey had seized my copy of ‘The Obedience of a Christian Man’ from her beloved, George Zouche.

I stood still, enjoying what no one else could see for perhaps just a few, brief minutes. Then suddenly I was struck by a familiar scent of rosewater perfume. There was no mistaking it, for it was Anne's favourite scent and I was intimately familiar with it; I applied it to my skin daily when I had walked in her 16th century shoes. I turned to see if a passerby might possibly be responsible for the aroma that filled my senses; but there was no one nearby. Still the scent persisted, strong and clear. It was if she was standing right next to me and I was seized by a heady mixture of apprehension and excitement and the strangest feeling that I was somehow outside of my own body, experiencing an event that felt profoundly familiar. The experience was very disorienting and winded me sorely. Dropping my bag to

the ground, I took refuge by sitting down on the grass in an effort to compose myself. Rather disconcertingly, the scent of rosewater and the feeling of déjà-vu persisted for perhaps ten or fifteen minutes, before gradually it lost its power over me and dissipated gently into morning breeze.

All the time, around me the world continued to turn; people went about their business, oblivious to the fact that I was teetering on the edge of something extraordinary. It was the first time in many months that I had experienced something akin to the strange, paranormal occurrences that had heralded my first time-slip into another world. Eventually, I was left with no sense of time but the present, and the scent of perfume was gone. I was back in my body and I felt well and strong. Although slightly bewildered, I decided to be on my way. I picked up my bag and set off back down the hill towards Greenwich Pier, all the time trying to shake off the possible implications of what had just shaken me to the core.



No matter what I thought of my time spent in another, lost world, I had come to appreciate the pier at Greenwich even more in my 21st century life. For boats have come and gone from that place for centuries; and whilst the old Palace of Greenwich had fallen into disrepair during the English Civil War, and was finally dismantled later the same century, the riverboats continued to provide a comforting sense of continuity with the past, shuttling the people of London up and down the Thames, as they went about their daily business. I boarded one of the large, passenger vessels which was headed up-river to Westminster Pier. To travel on the Thames through London was surely one of the most enjoyable ways to see the city. Away from its congested streets, the river afforded a rare sense of space and perspective upon some of London's most beautiful buildings; a perspective which was not available to those who remained land-bound.

Despite the fact that I remained slightly disoriented by my experience in Greenwich Park, I optimistically made straight for the upper deck, seating myself at the front next to an elderly couple, who were also wrapped up warmly against the choppy river breeze. A large camera slung about the gentleman's neck gave away the fact that he was a visitor to London, their perma-tanned skin telling me that they had come from climes warmer than England's temperate shores. As the boat pulled away from the Pier, I sat back in my seat unable to think of anything else but that Anne had made this very same voyage on two of the most important occasions of her life. I had no idea at the time that I would experience them both for myself; I just saw the heart-wrenching poignancy of how the great triumph of her coronation procession in 1533 had been all too soon followed by a journey that I knew must have been filled with unspeakable dread, fear and shame – her final river trip from Greenwich - the one which would take her to the Tower and to her

ultimate destiny on the scaffold. It was to be her last taste of freedom, and I felt shivers run down my spine, wanting to weep for her, as I so often did when I allowed myself to feel her life force running through my veins.

I heard the captain of the ship begin to give the witty patter that he has no doubt delivered a thousand times before, revealing the most interesting titbits of information, both past and present, of the river and its murky inhabitants. Next to me, the elderly couple began to speak to each other of the sites that unfolded before us, one after another, as we cut our way smoothly along the great expanse of winding river. It was soon apparent that they were visiting from the United States and I enjoyed their West Coast accent, amused as one often is to hear what foreigners think of far-flung lands and the place which you call home.

We were heading westwards, and with the sun behind us, I was able to enjoy the buildings glistening in the morning

light. One by one, we passed places which I had once known as open countryside, but were now crowded with swanky, expensive river apartments; the great

dockyards that filled with the pride of Henry's Navy, long since dismantled or lying silently in their watery graves. It probably took just twenty minutes to reach the Tower from Greenwich; powered by the modern miracle of the engine as our boat made light work of the turning tide. It was such a far cry from the many times in which I had to wait patiently with Henry for that same, immutable tide to turn in our favour, and even then, a similar journey could often take at least two hours.

I would come to know the Tower, this bastion of English history all too well; it would laud me in Anne's hour of triumph, and mock me in her hour of darkness. Whenever I was in its presence, it consumed me in a hornet's nest of conflicting emotions; of awe, reverence, morbid curiosity and repulsion; yet, I was never completely comfortable in its vicinity, the walls always whispering my name in

menacing tones. Thus, I was glad that that day we did not have to stop to allow passengers to disembark at Tower Pier; instead our vessel swept on past this most grizzly of fortresses, this most mighty of palaces, forging our way relentlessly towards Westminster. I remembered that part of the journey well from my Tudor life and the very first time that I stepped aboard the Queen's Royal Barge, to be conveyed as one of the ladies in attendance on Queen Katherine up river towards Henry's Palace at Richmond.

I recalled the daunting shadows cast by the mighty, old London Bridge falling upon my face, thankful that on this occasion I did not have to endure the grisly sight of the heads of decapitated traitors displayed upon its battlements. I saw in my mind's eye, the modern day facade of the northern bank of the Thames begin to melt away, and instead rise up in its place the great palaces and houses which abutted the river along the stretch of embankment which led westward toward Westminster; Baynard's Castle, Bridewell

Palace, Durham House and coming into view as we rounded the final bend in our journey, the stretch of river front which had once been dominated by the mighty Palace of Whitehall. At that time, I knew Whitehall Palace as York Place; for when I last walked in Anne's shoes, this most grand of houses was still very much in the possession of Cardinal Wolsey, and was the official London residence of the Archbishops of York. I would come to know the place well in time, just as I did all of Henry's great houses. I would walk in its most magnificent of galleries; idle away time in its pleasant gardens and furthermore, be secretly married to the King amidst the intimacy of the newly built Holbein Gate. But such wonders were yet to be known to me, and Henry had yet to set about building Anne a grand new suite of apartments befitting his new Queen. I cannot believe that as we sailed past its invisible facade, I was but a hair's breath away from my next encounter with my Tudor life.

As our vessel manoeuvred itself by degree against the quay, I

found myself queuing with a group of enthusiastic tourists, ready once more to set foot on land and to be delivered into the centre of Westminster – the beating heart of the capital, and of a country, for nearly one thousand years. As we waited, my mind wandered ahead, planning my route from Westminster tube station to Euston via the rather dilapidated Northern Line; in turn, it was just a short walk from there to my final destination, the British Library. As I pondered these practicalities, my mobile rang, alerting me to an incoming text. I felt immediately grumpy that someone from work was about to disturb my day of solitude and self-indulgence. I even thought for a moment to ignore it, and then thought better; rummaging around in my bag, I finally located it and read the message which stopped me in my tracks:

‘Rose and I had major argument. Don't think I can stand it anymore. Do you still want me? L D x’

In truth, I simply did not know what to make of it. I had

never received a text like this from Daniel before in my life; for whilst he and Rose were not particularly close, they always managed to bumble politely around one another, avoiding the screaming truth that their marriage had died a long time ago. The crowd around me moved, as the gangplank was fixed in place and the barrier lifted. I shuffled forward amidst a throng of fellow passengers, holding the phone in my hand and reading the message over and over again. Truly, I was lost for words. As the crowd brushed past me, I tapped in the briefest of replies,

‘What happened? R U OK? LA x’

Once more I was precipitously overcome with a feeling of apprehension that was difficult to explain, and could not be entirely attributed to the words I had just read. At the same time, my mind started to whirr with unanswered questions, the vacuum being filled spontaneously with a multitude of scenarios: What had they argued about? Had Rose found

out about us? Did Daniel mean it? Could he really not stand it anymore? Was this the real turning of the tide or just another wild goose chase that would leave me emotionally wrung out and gasping for air? I wanted Daniel to reply to my text immediately; frustratingly he did not. Yet I did not dare call him, for I had no idea what I might interrupt at the other end of the line. Reluctantly, after a few minutes of dithering, I put my phone back in my bag and made my way up the gangplank and onto Embankment; from there, it was but a short walk to Westminster tube on the corner of Parliament Square. Still hopeful to receive a reply, I waited for a few minutes more outside the entrance, knowing that my signal would be lost once inside. I desperately wanted Daniel to call or at least text a response to let me know more of what was happening; but a stubborn silence prevailed. Eventually, somewhat dismayed and deeply perturbed, I gave up waiting and plunged deep into the depths of the earth; there to hurtle along beneath London's streets, heading northbound toward the British

Library.

Honestly, for a building which housed such an array of precious antiquities, the British Library itself is far from attractive. Never being a fan of modern art or contemporary architecture, I singularly failed to appreciate either the beauty of its clean lines, or the austerity of its blunt angles. Yet, it is easy to forgive all this, for the building, only ten years old, was constructed through an act of Parliament in order to bring together a huge collection of books and manuscripts which were previously scattered in different locations. As I crossed the open square, heading straight toward the main entrance, I looked upwards to take in its full, five storeys and realised that this was one of the greatest libraries in the world, holding around 150 million items within its fortress-like, red-bricked walls. Yet, for all the delights that surely awaited me inside, I couldn't concentrate; I had still not heard from Daniel. By then I was becoming irritated that he should so selfishly send me

such a cursory note of such profound implication – and then leave me teetering on the brink of my own suddenly, very uncertain, fate. Feeling increasingly fractious, I rather too brusquely pushed open one of the many glass doors which opened up into the library's massive central lobby, almost knocking a disgruntled elderly gentleman over in the process.

Like most libraries around the world, the entrance hall was enshrined in hushed reverential tones as people crossed the concourse, passing this way and that, going silently about their business. I weaved my way toward the ticket desk, dodging people as I went, my irritation heightened even more by the long queue which predictably accompanies the opening day of a major exhibition. As dictated by my surroundings, I grudgingly turned my phone to 'vibrate'; yet nevertheless kept checking it in the futile hope that I would receive a vital message from Daniel. By the time I purchased my ticket, I was beginning to feel that something was terribly wrong. I remember being puzzled that the sense of dread

which was beginning to grip me was out of all proportion to the brief exchanged that Daniel and I had recently shared.

Nevertheless, to reach the ground floor exhibition, I had to walk back across the bright, white stone and marble concourse and as I did, rather unnervingly, it seemed that Henry's piercing eyes were watching me from giant posters which were hung about the entrance hall, boldly announcing his majestic presence from the grave as, 'Man and Monarch'. Suddenly I felt Henry drawing me in, calling me back to him. I thought I was going crazy, so I averted my eyes and hurried onwards, soon plunging into a marble-clad corridor, which in turn led me out into a large, darkened room.

The room was draped in black fabric and there was something comforting about that windowless space, its cool interior and muted lighting. It was like being sealed inside a gigantic womb, which magically held time suspended, sealing us off from the noise and frenetic bustle of the

outside world, allowing those of us inside to lose ourselves in a different time entirely. The room was quite full, although, for its size, it held the numbers well. Various spotlights shone down on numerous glass fronted display cabinets, brilliantly illuminating the objects within in bright pools of light. It quite took my breath away; I felt as if I had found myself in a treasure trove of familiar friends, and I sensed the energy calling to me from the huge array of priceless historical artefacts that spanned every decade of Henry's life.

I moved from one to the other, patiently waiting to take my turn, to pause and stare in wonder at the books and manuscripts in front of me, several of which I had either seen, or once held, within my hand. Oh, to read again the writing of my friend, Thomas Wyatt, to hear the sound of his words echoing in my ears across the centuries; to lay my eyes upon the familiar and rather erratic scrawl of my sworn enemy, Thomas Wolsey, in a letter which he had once penned to the king. One amazing piece of history after

another revealed itself to me, each one a survivor of the ravages of time and a fragment of a lost life; each one with its own, unbelievable story to tell. You could hear them whispering their secrets, if only you had an ear to hear and the eyes to see. As I stood alone at a cabinet, which had its own single spot light, I must have audibly gasped, for lying open in front me, was a book which I recognised immediately; it was a book of hours that had once belonged to Anne and which I alone knew had been a gift from the King; I had carried it with me daily and it was indeed a treasured possession. With the gentleness of caressing a long-lost lover, I placed both my hands on either side of the cabinet, peering forward to examine the page at which it was opened; the gory picture of the Flayed Christ, which I recognised only too well. Yet, below it was writing which had never been there in my day. It was an inscription in Henry's hand which read, 'If you remember my love in your prayers, as strongly as I adore you, I shall hardly be forgotten, for I am yours, Henry R forever.' I wondered

when Henry had written it there, what intimate moment had the two lovers shared which caused the King to pen his message. In turn, I read in the notes next to the book an explanation that Anne had replied in kind; ‘By daily proof you shall me find, to be to you both loving and kind.’ I suddenly felt so sad for them both, for to lose such love was a tragedy indeed.

“Why Henry? What happened? What caused you to forsake her so cruelly, when you loved her so entirely? These were the words that I whispered to myself, beneath my breath, wondering at the same time if somewhere out there Henry could hear my voice. I was lost in my world of imagining when out of nowhere, the scent of rosewater again filled my nostrils. I quickly straightened myself and looked about me; a man closely studying Henry's Great Bible in the cabinet nearby, turned his head, clearly startled by my sudden movement. I smiled rather feebly, only to watch him return my gesture and continue to his study of the text in front of him. There was no one else near me and yet I sensed

Anne everywhere around me.

Suddenly, I felt incredibly disoriented, as the oddest sensation surged through my body. I did not know what was happening to me and quite afraid, I gripped the edge of the cabinet for support. Then suddenly I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket; I had completely forgotten all about Daniel and his text, for I had been so entirely lost in my own secret world. Fumbling to retrieve it, I saw the screen alight, shining fluorescent in the semi-darkened room. Thereupon it was the text that I had been waiting for. I could scarcely believe my eyes as I read,

*'I've done it. I've left Rose. I need to see you. Where are you?
Love you, Daniel'*

It was the last thing that I remember. Twenty months in which I had tried to rebuild my life came crashing down around me in an instant. If I had thought that Anne was done with me, then I was wrong. I was about to find myself

in my heroine's body once more and this time, I would experience two of the most tumultuous, momentous and dramatic years of her tragic story; they would be years which would see Anne at the pinnacle of her triumph but that would ultimately leave both her, and me, on the edge of our utter ruin.

End of Book One

Glossary:

Long Gallery: an architectural term given to a long, narrow room, often with a high ceiling. In British architecture, long galleries were popular in Elizabethan and Jacobean houses; they were often located on the upper floor of the great houses of the time, and stretched across the entire frontage of the building. They served several purposes: among others, they were used for entertaining guests, taking exercise in the form of walking when the weather was inclement, and displaying art collections. **Arras:** another word for tapestry.

Barbican: a walled outwork or tower to protect a gate or drawbridge of a fortification.

Billament: the term used for the bands of decoration (usually of precious metals and stones) adorning a lady's

hood.

Blackwork: a form of embroidery using black thread.

Traditionally blackwork is stitched in silk thread on white or off-white linen or cotton fabric. Sometimes metallic threads or coloured threads are used for accents.

Book of Hours: a devotional book popular in the later Middle Ages; the most common type of surviving medieval illuminated manuscript. Like every manuscript, each book of hours is unique in one way or another, but most contain a similar collection of texts, prayers and psalms, often with appropriate decorations, for Christian devotion.

Breeches: garments worn by men

covering the body from the waist down.

Canopy of Estate: in the Middle Ages, a hieratic canopy of state, or cloth of state, was hung over the seat of a personage

of sufficient standing, as a symbol of authority. The seat under such a canopy of state would normally be raised on a dais. Emperors and kings, reigning dukes and bishops were accorded this honour.

Carcanet: a necklace. However, the word "necklace" was not used during the Tudor period. A necklace was called a "carcanet" which was like a wide choker. There were two main necklace designs; the short carcanet, or choker necklace, which was usually worn around the base of the throat, or on collar of a high necked doublet. Women also wore a longer, rope style necklace which could be draped up at the centre or the side with a brooch.

Dais: historically, the dais was a part of the floor at the end of a medieval hall, raised a step above the rest of the room. On this the lord of the manor dined with his intimates at the high table, apart from the followers and servants. In medieval halls there was generally a deep recessed bay window at one or at each end of the dais, supposed to be for

retirement, or greater privacy, than the open hall could afford.

Damask: an Arabic word (derived from the city of Damascus) used to describe a reversible pattern formed by a warp-faced satin weave and a ground weft-faced sateen weave in fabrics of silk, wool, linen, cotton or synthetic fibres.

Donjon: the French word for a ‘keep’ and used by architectural historians to describe the main tower associated with the Royal apartments at some of Henry’s great houses.

Doublet: a man's snug-fitting buttoned jacket that is shaped and fitted to the man's body; worn in Western Europe from the Middle Ages through to the mid-17th century. The doublet was hip length or waist length and worn over the shirt or drawers. Until the end of the 15th century, the doublet was worn under another layer of

clothing such as a gown, mantle, or overtunic.

Firkin: a quarter of a gallon.

Heraldic Device: features or designs on a personal badge of a family's coat of arms. These eventually developed into rather complex forms.

Hood: head dress worn by ladies of the period.

Kirtle: a type of sleeveless petticoat which supported the bust, but did not cinch in the waist, and with a full length skirt. The Kirtle could be back laced (by the 1530s this is more likely) or side laced beneath the arms (hidden lacing); this allowed for the neckline of the kirtle to be bejewelled, as seen in the portraits of the time. Very fine fabrics – such as a silk taffeta or satin were used where it will not be seen e.g. the bodice itself and back of the skirt. The front part of the kirtle (or forepiece), if it were visible, would be of a richer fabric to complement the rest of the outer gown. Please see links below for visuals of this description.

<http://www.ninyamikhaila.com/pix/c16thtowerelizred/c16thtowerelizred3.jpg>

<http://www.ninyamikhaila.com/pix/c16thtowerelizpurple/c16thtowerelizpurple3.jpg> (back view)

<http://www.ninyamikhaila.com/pix/c16thtowerelizpurple/c16thtowerelizpurple3.jpg> (front view)

Lord Chamberlain: the office dates from the Middle Ages, when the King's Chamberlain often acted as the King's spokesman in Council and Parliament. In Henry's day, The Lord Chamberlain was one of the chief functionaries of the court, generally responsible for organizing and overseeing the King's Privy apartments.

Lord Steward or Lord Steward of the Household: in England, was an important official of the Royal Household, responsible for organising the Royal household and the King's Privy Chambers (which was the responsibility of the Lord Chamberlain – see above). In Tudor England, the office was one of considerable political importance, and was

an appointment made by the Sovereign. Like many of the key offices of the King's household, the Lord Steward would bear a white staff as the emblem and warrant of his authority.

Lute: a musical instrument and can refer generally to any plucked string instrument with a neck (either fretted or unfretted) and having a deep round back.

Palfrey: a type of horse highly valued as a riding horse in the Middle Ages. It is not a breed. The significant characteristic of the palfrey was that, rather than trotting, it usually possessed a smooth, ambling gait.

Partlet: a woman's garment covering the neck and shoulders, often tied in place underneath the armpits and at the base of the neck. It provided extra warmth in the winter and protection from the sun in the summer.

Passamayne: Bands of embroidery used both as an edging and as applied trim.

Portcullis: a latticed grille made of wood, metal or a combination of the two. Portcullises fortified the entrances to many medieval castles, acting as a last line of defence during time of attack or siege. Each portcullis was mounted in vertical grooves in castle walls and could be raised or lowered quickly by means of chains or ropes attached to an internal winch'.

Possett: an English hot drink of milk curdled with wine or ale, often spiced, which was popular from medieval times to the 19th century.

Prie-dieu: (from French and literally meaning, "pray [to] God") is a type of prayer desk, primarily intended for private devotional use, but may also be found in churches.

Rebec: a bowed string musical instrument which derived from the Arabic bowed instrument, the *rebab*. In its most

common form, the rebec has a narrow boat-shaped body and 1-5 strings and is played on the arm or under the chin, like a violin and is a possible precursor of the violin.

Sarcenet: a fine, soft fabric, often of silk, made in plain or twill weave and used especially for linings.

Starling: a defensive bulwark, usually built with pilings or bricks, surrounding the supports of a bridge or similar construction. Starlings are shaped to ease the flow of the water around the bridge, reducing the damage caused by erosion or collisions with flood-borne debris, and may also form an important part of the structure of the bridge, spreading the weight of the piers.

The Astors: The Astor family is an Anglo-American business family of German origin notable for their prominence in business, society, and politics. During the

19th century, the Astors became one of the wealthiest families in the United States. Toward the end of that century, some of the family moved to Britain and achieved great prominence there, some members subsequently marrying into English aristocracy.

The Reformation: the Protestant Reformation was the 16th century schism within Western

Christianity initiated by Martin Luther, John Calvin and other early Protestants.'

The Sword of Calais: appears to be the 'nickname' given to the French executioner sent to from St Omer.

Tiltyard: was an enclosed courtyard for jousting. Tilt yards were a common feature of Tudor era castles and palaces.

Twelfth Night: is a festival in some branches of Christianity marking the coming of the Epiphany and concluding the Twelve Days of Christmas.

Virginal: a keyboard instrument of the harpsichord family. It was popular in Europe during the late Renaissance and early Baroque periods.

Wainscot Chair: named for the fine grade of oak usually used for wainscot panelling.

Wattle and daub: is a composite building material used for making walls, in which a woven lattice of wooden strips called *wattle* is *daubed* with a sticky material usually made of some combination of wet soil, clay, sand, animal dung and straw. Wattle and daub has been used in building for at least 6,000 years.

Wherry: a type of boat that was traditionally used for carrying cargo or passengers on rivers and canals in England, and is particularly associated with the River Thames.

Notes

In the notes that follow, I will attempt to separate fact from fiction for the purpose of authenticity and clarity. However, to begin with there are some general notes which apply throughout the book;

firstly, wherever possible I have attempted to recreate the palaces in which Anne lived as accurately as possible. In those scenes in which rooms are described, or in which Anne moves from one part of the Palace to another, the descriptions are largely based on floor plans taken from Simon Thurley's book, 'The Royal Palaces of Tudor England' (and in Vol. II, 'Whitehall Palace'). Descriptions of interior decoration come from; contemporary accounts, archaeological evidence, existing buildings, or extrapolations of what was known to be in fashion at the time.

secondly, in some instances, contemporary accounts tell us about the garments worn by Henry, Anne and her contemporaries. This is particularly true for those grand state occasions such as Anne's coronation. However, while the garments described are fictional, they are based on contemporary descriptions of garments worn by Tudor royalty and nobility, or by dresses seen in contemporary portraits. The appearance of some of Anne's everyday garments have been recorded in contemporary documents and in those instances, I have used these descriptions to inspire a particular costume.

Part One

Chapter One:

Sadly, no contemporary painting is known to exist of Anne Boleyn. However, there is a Holbein sketch of a lady,

thought to be Anne, and upon which the later painting which can be seen at Hever, appears to be based.

Part Two

Chapter One:

For the purposes of storytelling, the layout of some of the rooms that I have described in this and later chapters are not consistent with what is known of the original Tudor arrangement.

For example, it is unlikely that Anne had a separate bedroom of her own, rather the family probably slept together in the large ‘Solar’ on the first floor – perhaps with partitions to divide up between living and sleeping areas. There was also no library at Tudor Hever as far as I am aware. Books were extremely expensive items, and although Sir Thomas may have possessed some such items, it is unlikely that the library was as extensive as I describe in later chapters. This is also possibly true of

the gardens, as I have described them. The environs of the original Tudor Castle were much more wild and rugged, and it is entirely possible that no formal gardens existed at all. If you wish to read a full and more accurate account of the castle as Anne would have known it in her lifetime, please follow this link to an account which I wrote on the back of the original research that I did about mediaeval and Tudor Hever.

http://www.facebook.com/pages/Le-Temps-Viendra-A-Novel-of-Anne-Boleyn/105316199547890#!/note.php?note_id=145965875482922

The jewellery casket described is based on an early 14th century French Gothic ivory casket which was sold by Hever Castle (through Sotheby's) on Friday, 6 May, 1983. However, there is no known connection to Anne.

A note on diamonds: diamonds in the 16th century were not the light, sparkling, multifaceted stones that we know today. Because later cutting techniques were not in use at this time, diamonds often are seen as the black stones we see in portraits of 16th century noble men and women.

It seems that around Easter, 1527 Henry did indeed offer Anne the position of *Maitresse en titre*, his sole mistress above all others. Through Henry's love letters; it appears that Anne rejected his offer.

The letter which Mary recounts in this chapter is taken from the text of an original letter sent by the King to Anne in 1527.

Chapter Two:

At some point during the summer of 1527, Henry appears to have proposed to Anne and the first tentative enquiries towards seeking an annulment of the King's marriage to

Katherine of Aragon were made. However, the scene in which Henry proposes to Anne in the Rose Garden at Hever is entirely fictional.

Chapter Three:

The scene in which Anne rides out with Henry on the hunt is again fictional; although of course, the two of them spent many happy hours together in such pastime.

The buck killed in the forest by Henry at Greenwich is amongst one of, if not the earliest, presents recorded as being sent from Henry to Anne as a token of the king's 'love' for her.

The scene in which Anne first meets Thomas Wyatt in the Great Hall at Hever is also fictional. However, of course, there is much controversy around the relationship between the two in their younger years. Clearly, Thomas must have known Anne in childhood, as the Wyatts were

neighbours, with the family seat based at nearby Allington Castle. But the question has always remained; were they ever lovers? Thomas' poetry suggests that he at least had some feeling for her. However, as for the extent of the relationship? We simply do not know the answer. We do know, though, that Thomas had been away on a diplomatic mission that year, as described in the novel.

The scene in which Henry and Anne find themselves on the rooftop at Hever castle is entirely fictional.

Chapter Four:

At some early point in their relationship, Anne did send the King a gift of a piece of jewellery, a solitary damsel tossed in a ship, and from beneath which hung a diamond. The hidden message in this item of jewellery is as described in this chapter and represented a significant moment in the relationship between Henry and Anne, as she indicated to

the King her willingness to give herself into his hands. However, the scene in which Anne chooses this item of jewellery is entirely fictitious.

As with all the letters included in this novel, many are based, at least in part, on real letters which are still extant. Where I have added to the letters, I have tried to retain as much of the style of letter writing which would have been used at the time.

Chapter Five:

Allington Castle was the family seat of the Wyatt family, located some ten miles from Hever Castle in Kent. As such, the Boleyns and the Wyatts would have had a close relationship as neighbouring landed gentry. It is likely that Thomas Wyatt knew Anne as a young girl. The poem included in this chapter, '*Who List to Hunt?*' was written by Thomas Wyatt and believed to be about his feelings for Anne Boleyn; however, the scene in which

Anne reads the poem aloud in the gardens at Allington Castle is entirely fictitious. Also, although we know that at some point Thomas Wyatt is supposed to have stolen a locket from Anne, which was later the cause of an argument with the King, the scene included in this chapter where the item is stolen from Anne's pocket is also entirely fictitious; it seems that the original account has Thomas stealing the locket from Anne as she did her embroidery.

Chapter Six:

No know record or painting exists which provides us with a description or the actual appearance of George Boleyn, so my description is entirely of my imagination. In Wyatt's poem, written as a lament to the five men that died for their alleged crimes, he writes the following about George who was clearly a popular character and well-liked by his contemporaries:

‘Some say, ‘Rochford, hadst thou been not so proud, For thy

great wit each man would thee bemoan.’ Since as it is so, many cry aloud ‘It is great loss that thou art dead and gone’.

The exact date of many of the love letters between Anne and Henry are not known. The letter which I have included is, for the most part, one of the original letters written by Henry to Anne with some minor amendments; notably the addition of the request to come forth from Hever to Beaulieu. We do know however, that Anne did join Henry at Beaulieu in the summer of 1527, whilst the King was in the midst of his usual progress with Katherine.

Chapter Seven:

London Bridge was the only bridge across the Thames in the City of London during the Tudor period.

Norfolk House was located in Lambeth, close to the Archbishop’s Palace and the Parish

Church of St Mary is where the Howard family chapel and vault was established by the second Duke of Norfolk.

It was at Norfolk House that the ill-fated Catherine Howard, (later to be Henry VIII's fifth wife), was brought up by her step grandmother Agnes, the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk.

Beaulieu had once been owned by the Boleyn family before it was sold to Henry VIII in 1516.

The Royal Coat of Arms that once existed over the Great Gatehouse can now be seen in the Entrance Hall of what is left of the old Palace. This building is now called New Hall and functions as a school.

The letter is an original letter from Henry VIII written to Anne, and is one of the love letters which now reside within the Vatican library.

The scene in which Anne and Henry are reunited at

Beaulieu is fictional, although as stated above, Anne did join the King's summer progress at Beaulieu in the summer of 1527.

Anne was still in Katherine's service as a maid of honour in 1527, and that it was not until 1528 when she no longer waited upon the Queen.

Anne had a notoriously difficult relationship with her uncle Thomas, the third Duke of Norfolk. Although the Duke supported Anne in the early years of her relationship with Henry (no doubt because it had a positive effect on his own pre-eminence at court), theirs seems to have been a tempestuous relationship, with the Duke latterly increasingly unsupportive of Anne and the Boleyn family's reformist leanings, and the impact that this subsequently had on the Roman Catholic Church in England. By the 1530s the two appear to have fallen out. The meeting between Anne, her family and the Duke of Norfolk at Beaulieu is entirely fictitious.

Chapter Eight:

1527 was 'probably the 'wettest' pair of consecutive years since weather chronicles began.

1527 is regarded by some climatologists as being significantly wetter than 1528. In particular, in 1527, rain fell over 'England' (no specifics) every day from April 12th to June 3rd

http://booty.org.uk/booty.weather/climate/1500_1599.htm)

We do know that Anne Gainsford (Nan) was born circa 1495 and was in the service of Anne Boleyn as early as 1528. This surely made her one of the earliest ladies to attend on the future Queen. It was to Nan Gainsford that Anne Boleyn lent her copy of *'The Obedience of a Christian Man'* in the same year. She later recounted her memories of her time in Anne's service to her grandson, George Wyatt. As with most of Anne's ladies, we do not

know the exact nature of her relationship with Anne Boleyn. However, given the fact that she was one of the first ladies attending upon Anne, and that they shared religious sympathies, I have placed Nan Gainsford as one of Anne Boleyn's close friends and confidant.

Mary Fiennes, Lady Norris was born in 1495. As her mother was an elder half-sister of Elizabeth Howard, Anne Boleyn's mother, she was Anne and Mary Boleyn's cousin. Mary lived for six years at the French court serving Mary Tudor, then Queen Claude as maid of honour. In this capacity she must have spent a considerable amount of time with both Anne and Mary. On her return to England in 1520, she married Sir Henry Norris, who became close to the centre of the Boleyn faction and was close friends with both George and Anne. It is easy to see with these connections, why Mary Norris was probably within Anne Boleyn's close circle of friends.

Joan (sometimes known as Jane) Champernowe was

believed to have been born about 1505. She married Anthony Denny and was part of the burgeoning evangelical faction at court. It seems that Kat Champernowe was either her sister or cousin. Given the latter's unswerving loyalty towards the future Elizabeth I, and the family's reformist inclinations, I have assumed that Joan would have been easily accepted into Anne Boleyn's circle of friends and that she was probably a strong supporter of Anne.

The meeting between Anne Boleyn and Katherine of Aragon is entirely fictitious. However the description of Katherine's appearance is based upon a contemporary portrait.

Anne was indeed accomplished at all the past times expected of a noble woman. It is thought that she did set music to poetry that she had written, but that none of this survives.

It seems that Anne and Henry did sometimes ride pillion,

as was once commented on by a shocked Ambassador Chapuys.

The King did have his clothes scented with the perfume that is described in the text.

Chapter Nine:

We do know that for a period of time an alliance formed between Anne and the Boleyn faction, the Duke of Norfolk and the Duke of Suffolk, despite the fact that Charles Brandon would never be a supporter of Anne's. The common aim had been to bring Wolsey down, and in this cause, Anne seems to have played an active role as a key protagonist. However, this specific scene in which Anne is approached by the two Dukes in the presence of her father is entirely fictional.

The court did leave the Beaulieu in mid August, 1527, and travelled towards Richmond Palace. Whilst Havering is roughly on route between Beaulieu in Essex and Richmond in Surrey, the use of this, one of Henry's lesser houses, is

entirely fictitious in relation to this event.

The description of the Thames, London Bridge and the London skyline is taken from contemporary accounts, sketches and later reconstructions.

Richmond Palace was a particular favourite of Henry VII; whilst still one of Henry VIII's 'great houses', it began to fall out of favour after the early years of Henry's reign, and was later given to Anne of Cleves as part of her divorce settlement in 1540.

Chapter Ten:

In July, 1527 Wolsey headed a lavish embassy to France where he met with Francis I at Amiens. The Treaty of Amiens was subsequently signed, and which ushered in a decade of Anglo-French entente. At the same time, Wolsey was given the unofficial task of canvassing the opinion of the French King regarding the Henry's intended annulment proceedings.

The description of Cardinal Wolsey is taken from one of his most famous portraits. The initial meeting between Wolsey and Anne is entirely fictional. However, we do know that when Wolsey returned to court on 30th September and requested a private audience with the King (as would be usual), Anne, who had also been present, had responded as detailed in the novel.

Henry VIII annotated many of the documents and manuscripts he read by making notes in the margin, or drawing a small hand showing an extended index finger to point to the relevant paragraph within the text.

Whilst the summer of 1527 was undoubtedly a testing one for Cardinal Wolsey, he was not, as yet, out of royal favour. It seems that for some time to come, Anne and Henry continued to rely on the Cardinal's diplomatic and international connections to steer the King towards his annulment.

Chapter Eleven:

The winter of 1527/1528 was as described in the novel; it was exceptionally cold and the sea did in fact freeze in places. Because of the very wet summer, the wheat crop failed leading to rising prices of food and riots in the City of London.

The King's investiture into the order of St Michel took place on 1st November, 1527, and sealed the new peace treaty between England and France, which had been signed at Amiens.

A celebratory Mass was held in the Church of the Observant Friars at Greenwich on the morning of the King's investiture. I am assuming that Anne was there as lady-in-waiting to Queen Katherine.

The description of the eleven-year-old Princess Mary is

taken from a contemporary portrait that was painted around this time.

The 'Aragonese' faction was the name given to those individuals who rallied round Katherine, supporting her rights and status as England's true Queen and Henry's lawful wife.

George Zouche was betrothed to and later married, Nan Gainsford. It appears that he, like Nan, was in the service of Anne Boleyn by 1528, probably as some kind of equerry.

The scene in which Anne Boleyn tells Nan of the King's intention to make her Queen is entirely fictional.

The scene between Anne and George in this chapter is also entirely fictional.

The sight of Greenwich Palace was then, as it is now, overlooked by a hill upon which was built a mediaeval tower known as 'Duke Humphrey's Tower'. Eponymously

named, it had served to keep a watch over the main London to Dover road which ran close by, just south of the Palace. The road has long since disappeared and the tower was eventually torn down to be replaced by Greenwich Observatory which still stands today.

Greenwich Palace (originally known as the Palace of Placentia) was of course perhaps one of the greatest, and indeed most favoured of Henry's palaces during the middle years of his reign, certainly before the building and refurbishment of Whitehall and Hampton Court. Anne probably spent the majority of her time at court at the Palace, and it was indeed here that she gave birth to Elizabeth in 1533, and from where she was taken to the Tower only three short years later, in 1536.

A celebratory tournament was organised for the afternoon following the King's investiture; and it was also cut short due to bad weather as described in this chapter. In the evening a great masque was organised by Cardinal Wolsey.

The exact nature of the masque held that evening is unknown. I have used an account of the masque which took place earlier in Henry's reign, called 'Riche Mount' as inspiration for this particular scene.

Anne de Montmorency; Grand Master of France was guest of honour at the masque, representing King Francis. At this time, Queen Katherine still presided over the court as Henry's consort.

As with all buildings described in the novel, the positioning and structure of the Banqueting Hall is taken from contemporary pictures, and later archaeological evidence; whilst the description of its interior is inspired by contemporary and expert accounts of how such rooms would be used and furnished.

The scene in which Henry dances with Anne, and which she later retires to the King's Chambers is entirely fictional.

However, it does seem that from some point in 1528, Anne was no longer in attendance upon Katherine and that Henry had granted her a small personal household, as befitting her rising status at court.

Chapter Twelve:

Sometime between early November, 1527 and Christmas of that same year, Anne retired to Hever. Many historians postulate that she was playing hard to get and that a tactical withdrawal from court was to keep Henry at arm's length. Whilst I believe that this is a reasonable hypothesis, I also believe that by keeping a low profile, the couple were hoping to keep the argument behind Henry seeking an annulment from his wife untainted by excessive salacious gossip about his lust for Mistress Anne.

‘Roman de la Rose’ is a medieval French poem styled as an allegorical dream vision. In courtly literature, such

works were both to entertain as well as to teach the Art of Love.

We know very little about Anne's early life, education and the influences which shaped her later thinking - particularly before she left England heading for the Low Countries in 1512.

William Tyndale is known as, 'The Father of the English Bible'. He printed an entire first edition of the New Testament in Worms, whilst in exile on the continent. This edition was subsequently smuggled into England but declared a banned and heretical text from early 1526.

We do not know for sure about the relationship between Mary Boleyn and her parents, nor indeed between Anne and her sister. One does get the impression that Anne and George were closer, and more favoured, by their parents. However, our judgement may be coloured by our knowledge that eventually Mary Boleyn was cast out of the family (although

as you will see in Volume II, I believe that this was for very understandable reasons). However, I do not believe that there is any evidence that prior to this cataclysmic event, Mary and Anne were anything but affectionate towards one another; with Mary attending upon Anne during many pivotal events in her life. However, when Mary Boleyn was ultimately cast out from the family, it seems to have been done ruthlessly, rejecting Mary's subsequent pleas for assistance. My postulation that Elizabeth Boleyn was less close to Mary on account of her infamous reputation is, however, purely conjectural.

There is considerable speculation that Mary's two children were fathered by Henry VIII and that they were two of the King's illegitimate bastards. However, the King never claimed paternity over either of Mary's children.

On display in Hever Castle is Anne's book of hours; here, on one page, under the picture of the Last Judgement she has written, '*Le temps viendra Je Anne Boleyn*', along with a

picture of an astrolabe as described in the text. *Le temps viendra* means, 'the time will come'. It is my view that this is a remarkably poignant piece of prose which gives us an insight into Anne's emotional state and was perhaps written during a moment of reflection as to where her future would take her.

Chapter Thirteen:

Margaret, or Margery, Wyatt was indeed Thomas Wyatt's elder sister. I have chosen Margery as a close friend of Anne's based on the story that it was to Margery Wyatt that Anne had passed her prayer book upon the scaffold. It is undoubtedly true that the two women knew each other well, as the Wyatt and Boleyn family were indeed neighbours as described in the book.

However, the scene in which Margery Wyatt visits her at

Hever on Christmas Eve, 1527 is entirely fictional.

The description of Margaret Wyatt comes from the 16th century portrait of her, which is currently housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The description of Anne and her mother visiting Allington Castle for the Christmas festivities is purely fictional.

In George Wyatt's 'Life of Queen Anne Boleigne' he describes Thomas taking a jewel from Anne's pocket whilst she was 'earnest at work' (rather than at playful pastime which I describe in the novel); subsequently, he refused to return it. We do not know exactly when this incident happened, but from George Wyatt's account, it seems to have been sometime around the time that Anne and Henry pledged themselves in marriage. Interestingly, Wyatt says that '...in the end [the king] fell to win her by treaty of marriage, and in this talk took from her a ring, and that wore upon his little finger.' Thus the scene in which

the King and Thomas Wyatt argue over Anne at bowls must have been sometime after Anne consented to marry the King as the King deliberately pointed toward the bowl clearly displaying Anne's ring upon his finger.

The letters described in this chapter are two of the seventeen 'love' letters written in Henry's hand to Anne Boleyn which are now held in the Vatican archives. The letters which survive bear testament to the amount of time that Henry and Anne spent apart from each other in the early days of their romance. From the end of the 1520's, when Anne began to spend more time at court, and Katherine was eventually supplanted, these letters naturally came to an end. The letter written from Anne to Henry is fictional, but is inspired by phrases used by Anne in other letters she is known to have written.

Chapter Fourteen:

Sometime in early February, 1528, Drs Stephen Gardiner

and Edward Foxe arrived at Hever Castle. They had been sent by the King on a mission, as described in the novel. The letter is genuine; it was written by Henry and seems to have accompanied his two ambassadors, who seemed to have been ordered to stop off at Hever to update Anne on their progress. (NB: *Ultra posse non est esse* – ‘what is beyond possibility cannot exist’).

The description of Stephen Gardiner is taken from a contemporary portrait (painted later in his court career when he was Bishop of Winchester). As far as I am aware, no known portrait of Edward Foxe (c. 1496 – 8 May 1538) exists, and whilst there are descriptions of Gardiner’s character, I was not able to find similar for his companion. However, clearly Foxe was a strong supporter of Anne. He is described as ‘an English churchman, Bishop of Hereford (created at Winchester in 1535 alongside two other churchmen of reformist leanings). He was the most Lutheran of Henry VIII's bishops, and assisted

in drafting the *Ten Articles* of 1536’.

In 1527, Rome was sacked by the Emperor’s forces and the Pope effectively taken captive, eventually coming to live in exile in Orvieto.

The scene that takes place between Anne and Dr Foxe in the long gallery at Hever is entirely fictional. However, we do know that Tyndale’s, ‘The Obedience of a Christian Man’ was printed in 1528, and that Anne had a copy in her possession that same year, (it was to be seized by Cardinal Wolsey as we shall later see).

Chapter Fifteen:

The location of Hampton Court Palace, its dimensions and the buildings that could be seen from the south bank of the River Thames, are taken from contemporary, 16th century drawings of the Palace.

Cardinal Wolsey was infamously a butcher’s son from

Ipswich in Suffolk who had risen to be arguably the most powerful man in England, next to the King.

After four months in seclusion at Hever Castle, Anne returned to court at the end of February 1528. She was the King's guest of honour, and was no longer in Katherine's service.

The scene in which Henry greets Anne on arrival at Windsor is entirely fictional.

We know from Henry's suit of armour that the King was approximately 6'2" in height. We do not know Anne Boleyn's exact height, only that she was of 'middling' stature, which would be about 5ft 2-4 in for a woman in the 16th century.

We do not know the exact nature of the lodgings in which Anne was housed when she arrived at court in February, 1528. Nor do we know exactly when the first members of her household were appointed (only that this occurred

sometime during 1528). We do know, however, that Nan Gainsford was one of the first ladies appointed to attend upon Anne. The appointment of Mary Fiennes, Lady Norris is fictional. The description of the interior of the lodgings in this chapter is based on Wolsey's lodgings at Hampton Court Palace; such lodgings clearly were meant to accommodate a person of very high status at court and I used these as an inspiration to describe Anne's accommodation at Windsor. (NB: Wolsey's apartments can still be seen today at Hampton Court). It is however possible that Anne was not lodged at Windsor Castle, but in one of the hunting lodges in Windsor Park. Further research has uncovered that the banquet that Henry held in Anne's honour was at the, 'lodge in the little park' at Windsor and not in the Castle as is described in the novel. The little park is now known as 'Home Park' and we know that a Lodge of some description did exist in the grounds, although it is no longer standing today. Questions which arise are: Was Anne housed here at a discreet distance from Katherine

and the rest of the court during her entire stay at Windsor? Did this allow Henry and Anne a degree of privacy that could not be obtained at the Castle? Did this help maintain the pretence that Henry was seeking an annulment only on account of his conscience?

The description of the dress worn by Anne (and its various complex layers) has been verified by an expert in Tudor costume. I have always found the dress of the Tudor noblewoman slightly mysterious and wanted to include this detailed account to give a feeling for how Anne would be dressed every day.

As I have mentioned, we do not know exactly where Anne was lodged whilst at Windsor. The novel describes lodgings within the castle itself. However, as ever, the layouts of the rooms in the King's apartments at Windsor Castle are as they would have been. This information has been taken mainly from four plans included in Simon Thurley's, 'The Royal Palaces of Tudor England'.

Joan Champernowe was indeed pregnant once again in early 1528.

As described above, on 25th February, 1528 Henry put on a lavish banquet at, 'the Lodge in the little park' at Windsor in honour of Anne. In letters and papers of Henry VIII for this day, an account survives of the costs of this banquet, and includes a list of the food that was served. This was reflected in the novel.

The wardship issue between Sir Thomas Cheney and Sir John Russell did happen and was probably an example of one of Anne's earliest interventions in court politics. It made an ally of Sir Thomas Cheney, who Anne supported in gaining the wardship of Anne Broughton, but a long-term enemy in his adversary, Sir John Russell, who would later speak of her in spiteful terms.

The scene in which Anne rides out hunting with Henry from

Windsor is completely fictional. However Engine Court can still be seen at the Castle today.

The encounter between Anne and Katherine is purely fictional. However, the place in which this scene is described did exist within the 16th century Castle.

Chapter Sixteen:

On the 3rd March, 1528 Anne did indeed have supper with Thomas Heneage, who was no doubt being courted by Anne as a proxy for Cardinal Wolsey. At the time, Thomas was part of Wolsey's household. However, he was a rising man at court and soon to be transferred to Henry VIII's service, where he would later supplant Sir Henry Norris as Groom of the Stool in 1536.

The letter from Cardinal Wolsey to Anne, which is included in this chapter, is entirely fictional. However, it is constructed from the influence of other contemporary letters

and signed as Cardinal Wolsey often signed his letters. (NB: Ebor is an abbreviation of "*Eboracum*", the Latin name for "York" and is a title that the Archbishop of York is permitted to use to sign his name instead of surname).

Chapter Seventeen:

At some point during the court's stay at Windsor Castle, the King and Anne picnicked at Windsor Manor. It is not entirely clear which lodge this was, as more than one existed within Windsor Park. However, I have chosen the 'old Manor of Windsor' which appears to have been a mediaeval hunting lodge buried deep in the heart of Windsor Great Park, and close to what is now called Virginia Water (some of the earthworks which formed the moat can still be seen today). The lodge itself no longer exists. The King in fact did appear to borrow tables and stools from the townsfolk of Windsor; whilst food and kitchen equipment were brought down from the Castle.

The Ankerwyke Yew is an ancient tree which still stands today. It is an ancient yew tree, close to the ruins of St Mary's Priory, the site of a Benedictine nunnery built in the 12th century. It is near Wraysbury in Berkshire, England. It is a male tree with a girth of 8 metres (26 ft) at 0.3 metres. Various estimates have put its age at between 2,000 and 2,500 years. It is thought that the Magna Carta was signed here. For Anne and Henry, it is the stuff of legend as it is believed that the couple courted beneath its very branches in the early days of their romance. Both events have been captured in the following poem:

"What scenes have pass'd, since first this ancient Yew

In all the strength of youthful beauty grew!

Here patriot Barons might have musing stood,

And plann'd the Charter for their Country's good;

And here, perhaps, from Runnymede retired,

The haughty John, with secret vengeance fired,

Might curse the day which saw his weakness yield

*Extorted rights in yonder tented field.
Here too the tyrant Henry felt love's flame,
And, sighing, breathed his Anne Boleyn's name;
Beneath the shelter of this Yew-tree's shade, The royal lover
wood'd the ill-star'd maid; And yet that neck, round which
he fondly hung, To hear the thrilling accents of her tongue;
That lovely breast, on which his head reclined,
Form'd to have humanized his savage mind;
Were Doom'd to bleed beneath the tyrants steel,
Whose selfish heart might doat, but could not feel.*

*O had the Yew its direst venom shed,
Upon the cruel Henry's guilty head,
Ere Englands sons with shuddering grief had seen
A slaughterer's victim in their beauteous queen!"*

The detail of the picnic at medieval Manor of Windsor, and the scene in which Anne dances for Henry, is entirely fictional. However, the Letters and Papers of Henry VIII indicate the food that was eaten at that picnic; this is

included, as stated, in the novel.

Apparently, Anne was famed for creating new dance steps and was clearly a most accomplished dancer, noted for her grace and elegance.

Chapter Eighteen:

As was often the case, the court found itself at Greenwich for the annual May Day joust, a day of great celebration at court. Of course, in 1536 it would be at this very same joust that Henry would receive a message which would cause him to depart immediately, never to see Anne again.

In 1528, Anne did indeed lend Nan Gainsford her copy of William Tyndale's, 'The Obedience of a Christian Man'. This book was prescribed as an heretical text. It was in turn taken from Nan by her beloved, George Zouche. Subsequently, this was seized by the Dean of the Chapel Royal on behalf of Cardinal Wolsey as described in the novel. We do not

know the exact circumstances in which Nan was lent this book; therefore, the detail of this particular scene is entirely fictional.

It is known that Anne often marked particular tracts which interested her in a text with her thumbnail.

Chapter Nineteen:

It is true that both 1527 and 1528 were some of the wettest years on record.

We do not know exactly when Wolsey seized a copy of, ‘The Obedience of a Christian Man’, nor of the specific circumstances in which Anne found out the news. However, we do know that she was audacious and bold in her response; clearly confident in the King's love for her, Anne took the initiative, going immediately to Henry before the Cardinal could reach his ear.

In writing this book, I have come to understand how pivotal

this moment was in setting England upon its course to break from Rome. Anne's quick thinking and courage brought to the King's eye the book which would change his thinking forever about the relative position of King and Church in England.

Once more, we do not know the exact details of the moment in which Anne confronted Henry with Wolsey's treachery. Yet some of the words Anne used and were recorded by 16th Century contemporaries are included in the text. We also know that the Henry gave Anne his ring to deliver to the Cardinal, so that his first minister would know that the request to return it was by the King's command.

Chapter Twenty:

The scene in which Anne talks with her father in the gardens at Greenwich is entirely fictional.

There was indeed an outbreak of measles at Greenwich

Palace in May that year, which affected the Princess Mary. Henry was concerned and as a result, moved Anne and her mother to accommodation in the Tiltyard Towers – at a distance from the main Palace buildings. The description of the Tiltyard Towers I have taken from contemporary sketches, known archaeological evidence, and descriptions of modern day historians including, Simon Thurley and David Starkey. The latter describes the following: ‘In 1515 work started on the tilt-yard. It was as well equipped as any modern stadium with two five-storey viewing towers, a spectators' gallery, a sort of 'hall of fame', in which armours for horse and men were displayed on wooden dummies, and nearby the royal armour manufactory’.

<http://www.historytoday.com/david-starkey/destruction-and-renewal-introduction-henry-viii>).

We know something of Dr Edward Foxe's return to court as he penned a letter on 11th May, 1528 to his companion, in which he describes how he was received by the Henry and

Anne. Having reached Greenwich Palace (on Sunday, 3rd May), Henry immediately dispatched Edward Foxe to take the good news to Anne that the two of them had been successful in their mission to procure a decretal commission from the Pope. Whilst I describe Anne and Henry receiving the news together at dinner, in fact, initially Anne received Edward Foxe alone in the Gallery of the Tiltyard Towers, later being joined by Henry. We know that Anne made, ‘marvellous demonstrations of joy’, and one suspects that the couple were elated at this apparently fortuitous turn of events. Fox also states that Wolsey left the palace two hours earlier (i.e. at 3 pm in the afternoon). Thus, Henry had then dispatched Dr Foxe immediately to Durham House, as described in the novel. Unfortunately, Wolsey subsequently found that the Pope had played a blinding hand by including a loophole in the commission which both ambassadors had missed; this sadly rendered the document virtually useless.

Chapter Twenty One:

On Tuesday, 16th June, 1528 Cardinal du Bellay reports that one of Anne Boleyn's, '*filles de*

chambre' (chambermaids) fell ill with sweating sickness and subsequently the King left in

'great haste and went a dozen miles off.' There is also a letter from Henry himself dated 16th June, 1528, in which he writes that Anne has been taken ill and dispatches his physician to attend her. However, a later letter of Cardinal du Bellay, dated 21st July, 1528 states that, 'in Kent it [sweating sickness] is rife at this moment. Mlle de Boulen and her father have had the disease, but they recovered.' Most historians seem to state that Anne did not contract sweating sickness until she was at Hever. Therefore, it is possible that either the King was mistaken that she had fallen ill with sweating sickness, or perhaps she was suffering from some lesser malady which coincided with the outbreak of sweating sickness in her household.

Or, it is possible that this letter was misdated during its

transcription into the letters and papers archives and that it in fact refers to the following month.

The combination of lavender, sage, marjoram and rosewater is apparently a Tudor remedy for headache.

Dr William Butts: later, Sir William Butts (c. 1486 – 22 November 1545) was a member of King Henry VIII of England's court and served as the King's physician. Butts was a Protestant and became a close associate of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and later, Catherine Parr, the sixth wife of Henry VIII. His family also became significant leaders of the Puritan faction in Norfolk.

The scene in which Anne hears that Bess has fallen ill with sweating sickness is entirely fictional, but based on the report (described above) that a young lady of Anne's household had been the first to fall ill first with the dreaded disease. Henry fled sweating sickness at Greenwich by travelling to Waltham Abbey with Katherine at his side. We

do not know what Anne's reaction was to the King's sudden departure from Greenwich.

Chapter Twenty Two

To this day, nobody knows the exact cause of sweating sickness. 'Sweating sickness, also known as "English sweating sickness" or "English sweate" (Latin: *sudor anglicus*), was a mysterious and highly virulent disease that struck England, and later continental Europe, in a series of epidemics beginning in 1485. The last outbreak occurred in 1551, after which the disease apparently vanished. The onset of symptoms was dramatic and sudden, with death often occurring within hours. Its cause remains unknown. However usefully, in a letter dated 18th June, 1528 written by Cardinal du Bellay, the French ambassador, we have a description

of the symptoms typically associated with the disease and are as described in the novel.

George Boleyn fell ill with sweating sickness whilst at Waltham Abbey whilst attending upon the King. However, he made a full recovery. The letter included in this chapter is a genuine letter penned to Anne by the King's hand.

Part Three: Chapter Three:

The Ankerwyke Yew can still be visited today. Its position next to the few remains of what was once the beautiful Priory of St Mary is as described in the novel. Yew trees were often planted close to religious houses, as they have a strong symbology in Christianity around death and rebirth. Oftentimes, the Yew tree outlived the Priory or monastery next to which it was once planted. Such is the case with the Ankerwyke Yew.

Chapter Four:

The original medieval village of Hever was positioned just to the west of the Castle as described in the novel. It was moved

by Lord Astor during his refurbishments of Hever Castle in order to give the family more privacy.

In Anne's time, the kitchens at Hever were located where the Inner Hall currently stands.

Anne Boleyn's Book of Hours in which she has inscribed the eponymous title of this novel, is on display at Hever Castle today.

The tapestry described in this chapter is also on display in the 'Book of Hours' room. It has been suggested that Anne and her sister Mary are probably depicted in this tapestry. I personally believe that she is, in the top right-hand corner, as described in the text. If so, this is possibly one of the most contemporary images of Anne that is currently known to exist.

St Peter's Church just outside the entrance to the Castle was probably the family's place of worship, as it is thought that

there was not a private chapel within the Castle itself. In 1465, Sir Geoffrey Boleyn, Anne's great grandfather, was responsible for establishing a chantry in the church. Within this chantry is the very fine Purbeck marble tomb of Sir Thomas Boleyn, Anne's father.

Dear Reader,

You've read the book, now bring it to life and experience Anne's journey for yourself.

If you want to visit the locations mentioned in the novel, please visit www.letempsviendra.co.uk and go 'In Search of Le Temps Viendra, a Novel of Anne Boleyn' through the interactive Le Temps Viendra trail.

Sarah Morris

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